

## **What is wrong with our kids? by creeper1**

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**Summary:** After season 3, nightmares plague the Party and soon their parents begin to take notice.

## 1. Chapter 1

AN: Set after season 3, the party must now deal with the horrible nightmares that plague them. Soon their families begin seeing something is terribly wrong

### Chapter 1: Nightmares

#### *Will*

Will Byers practically jumped out of bed. A slight shout escaped him as he escaped from the horrors in his mind. His heart racing, sweat coming from his forehead. He saw he was in his bedroom in Springfield. He lay back down in his bed and began getting his breathing under control.

It had been two months since they left Hawkins. His mother said they needed a fresh start. And she was right. The past couple of years took a toll on all of them. But since leaving Hawkins, it seemed Will and El were now experiencing the nightmares they kept hidden in their own minds.

"Will honey, is everything ok?" Joyce called from the door. Will let out a breath, he swore she could sense his nightmares now. "Yea mom, just another dream." He called. The door opened and Joyce walked in, sitting at the foot of his bed.

"I'm sorry honey, I know how difficult it's been." She said. putting a hand on his knee. Will looked up and saw El and Jonathan on either side of his bed, looking concerned. Will smiled to himself.

"Don't worry mom, its getting better at least." Will said.

"No, it's not." Joyce said simply. Will felt a familiar twinge in the back of his neck. He looked up and saw El had a wide smile, Jonathan had an exact matching one.

"Why is everyone smiling?" Will asked. He looked at his mom, the same wide smile the others had.

"Because honey." She began, black ooze coming from her eyes, and

mouth. "Everything is about to be all right" She said in a new voice. It was deep, and hungry. "We are going to be one."

El began collapsing to the floor, her body melting down to basic goo, Jonathan followed. Will was about to run when his mother lunged at him and pined him down.

"You are one of us Will." The Mind Flayer said through his mom. Will was struggling under her grip. He looked behind and saw the creature reformed. A roar came from the massive maw of the beast.

"One of us." He heard and looked to see Mike walk in and melt and join the beast.

"Together forever" Lucas said walking behind Mike and melting.

"We can play together." Dustin said following Lucas.

"No more judgement." Max said, rounding them out.

The beast was soon the creature that they fought at Starcourt. Tearing through the room.

"One of us." Joyce said, and black ooze erupted from her mouth onto Will.

Will woke up screaming. But a few minutes prior, another person in the house also has demons.

*El*

The familiar notes of her favorite song rang into her room. The twang from the guitar made her jump out of bed. She realized the past few months must have been a horrible dream. Her dad wasn't dead, she was still making out with Mike to Hopper's frustration and she wasn't living far away.

She rushed out of her room and into the living room, excitement enveloped her body as she prepared to greet her dad. She stopped dead at the sight by the record player.

He was wearing a yellow shirt with a white apron, dancing in the

same way her father danced that day he brought her to the cabin. He had a wide smile on his face, and a bleeding hole in the side of his head.

"What, you thought your dad was here? Well, he might be, you got him killed to." Benny Hammond said, still dancing. Coming out of Hopper's room was Barb and Billy, dancing together. Barb was decaying like how she was found in the Upside Down, and Billy had several wounds all over his body, including the hole in his chest from when the Mind Flayer killed him. "I would probably still be alive if you weren't a coward." Barb said. Billy have her a spin. "My sister is probably being abused, but you were to weak to finish the job and look what I became." Billy said.

El walked backwards in fear. She bumped into something in the doorframe of her room. She turned and it was Hopper, rage etched onto his face. "How could anyone love a monster like you?" he said through gritted teeth.

He grabbed her by her arm and forced her out the door and threw her to the ground. She looked up and saw Mike, sneering at her. "We all could have died because of you. I never loved you, you are to evil to love." He said kicking her side. She doubled over in pain. Mike and Hopper grabbed her by her arms and dragged her away.

She was taken to the quarry and was taken to the edge. "Your broken and useless. You know what we do to useless things?" Hopper asked.

"We throw them away," Mike said and the two flung her off the cliff. She hit the water hard.

El woke up to her own screams.

*Mike*

Back in Hawkins, Mike Wheeler goes into his own nightmares.

He was headed to Hopper's cabin. It was a quiet afternoon, one he liked to experience with El. He made his way to the cabin steps and knocked on the door. It opened on his own and Mike stepped in. The cabin was destroyed, from the attack from the Mind Flayer. He

looked around to her room and there he saw it was packed up and gone.

Mike ran out and headed to Will's house and saw it was sold, a new family had already moved in. He then ran to Lucas's house. They also moved away. He then tried Dustin's home, and it was also sold to another family.

Mike ran home, tears brimming in his eyes. He heads home, just as he sees his family packing up a moving truck.

"Mom, where are we going?" He asks. She turns around on him. "Oh you noticed? Well Mike, if you weren't spending time with El and not neglecting everyone around you, we might be taking you with us." She said. Mike looked at her confused.

"That's right boy, you didn't want us around, so now we don't want you around." His father said getting in the car.

"It's for the best. You are such a selfish brat. El probably is with someone who isn't a jerk like you." Nancy said, hopping in the back seat. Holly just kicked his shin.

The car backed out of the driveway, leaving Mike alone.

He woke up sobbing.

*Nancy*

Nancy was walking with Jonathan through a park. It was something she loved doing. Just, being with him was all she liked doing. He was smiling, a feat she only sees when they are together.

They walk hand in hand along the trail, Nancy laughing at a joke Jonathan told. They round a corner and standing in the trail, Nancy sees a redhead. She is dressed rather conservatively, long pants and a blouse. Nancy recognizes her immediately. "Barb?" She asks. She turns around, and it is Barb. Decaying, putrid Barb. Jonathan is now no longer around. It's just the two of them.

"You left me to die." Barb accused. "You didn't need me at that party. You just wanted me their to feel superior while you spread your legs

for Steve." She said, an accusing finger being pointed at Nancy.

"Barb, no, I wanted you there so they could see....."Nancy said, but was interrupted again.

"YOU FORGOT ABOUT ME! YOU HAVE HAPPINESS WHILE I ROT!" Barb shouted. She lunged for Nancy. Nancy turned and ran, heading into the woods.

She ran as fast as her feet could take her, but the monster of her best friend seemed close behind. "ALL YOUR FAULT" She screamed. Nancy looked behind to see Barb catching up. She didn't notice the hole in the ground. Nancy fell inside and landed in a coffin.

"YOU DESERVE TO ROT YOU WHORE!" Barb said, slamming the lid shut. Nancy began pounding on the lid as she heard mounds of dirt being flung onto the makeshift grave.

When Barb was done, she put a marker on the grave.

Nancy Wheeler

Whore

Nancy woke up screaming.

*Dustin*

He made is way up the hill to Weathertop. The others were off at the arcade, but they understood that Dustin had a date with Suzie. Once a week, the two would sit at the radio for hours on end. Mike was the same way with El. Heck that was getting so bad that Mike and Dustin had begun work on turning Cerebro into a transmitter so they didn't have to make the trek to Weathertop except for maintenance.

He sat down next to the machine and powered it up. He began turning the dials till he reached the frequency he needed.

"Suzie, do you copy?" He said. He got a response immediately. "Yes Dusty-Bum, I can hear you." The giddy voice of Suzie came through the receiver. They exchanged updates on their lives. Dustin laughed at a joke Suzie told from her school.

"Dusty-Bum, I wanna hear it." She said. Dustin smiled. He was always ready to sing for Suzie. And hopefully this time an entire Russian base and most of his friends won't hear it.

"Turn around, look at what you see." Dustin began, but was cut off by Suzie.

"No, I don't want to hear that. I wanna hear something else." She said.

"What do you wanna hear Suzie-Poo." Dustin said with a grin,

"I wanna hear how you got him killed." She said. Dustin's grin dropped into a frown.

"Um... What do you mean?" Dustin asked.

"You know, how you didn't know a simple fucking equation and delayed getting it to Hopper because you wanted to do a sing along with me and now Hopper is giblets." Suzie said in a sweet voice.

"Suzie, that wasn't my fault." Dustin began. "Oh yes it was, that's why El never speaks to you. You killed her dad. It's why the others prefer to hang out with you gone. It's why Mike hates you. It's all your fault." Suzie said, her sweet voice now dripping with menace.

"It's not my fault!" Dustin shouted. "Why don't you ask El?" Suzie asked. He could see a smirk on her face somehow.

Dustin looked up and saw El, she was standing a few feet away. Tears were streaming down her face.

"You were supposed to be smart. My dad is gone because of you!" She said, and she began storming off. Dustin got up to try and catch up to her. "El wait!" Dustin called.

He tried to run after her, but a booming voice behind him spoke. "Turn around, tell me what you see." The voice growled.

Dustin turned around and saw him. A burned and mutilated form of the former Hawkins Police Chief. He let out a horrible roar and kicked Dustin back. Hopper grabbed the antenna and was about to jam it through Dustin's chest.

Then he woke up. Sweat pouring down his face. He then began crying. "It's all my fault." He said through his tears.

### *Lucas*

They were hiding by the car. The monster was hunting for their friend and Lucas had no idea how he was supposed to help. He could see them trapped by The Gap. Lucas looks at his wrist rocket and a plan forms in his mind. He stands up and takes aim. Through the corner of his eye, he sees the monster's tendrils creeping towards his friends. Lucas see's his target and fires.

It's a miss. But before he can reload and try to hit the balloon again, a shriek diverts his attention. He sees the tendril pulling Max from where she was hiding. Lucas tries to rush to save her, but a second tendril grabs an arm. The creature then begins pulling and Max begins screaming in pain. Lucas tries to shoot the balloon again but he can't concentrate. He looks over just in time to see Max split in two. Her torso flung next to him. Life ebbing out of her as blood rushes out of her. Lucas grabs her hand. A small voice comes from her dying lips.

"You failed us all." She said. Lucas looks over to see everyone held up by tendrils. Mike, El, Nancy, Will, Dustin, Jonathan, Hopper, Steve, Robin, Murray, and Erica. Lucas is frozen in fear. Billy, possessed by the monster grabs him and makes him see.

"This is the result of your failure." He sneers. The monster then begins ripping them apart, one by one. Devouring his friends. Lucas struggles to look away but his grip is too much. Once his friends were done being shredded by the creature. Billy picks him up and carries him to the creature.

"Now it's your turn" And he is tossed into the creatures' jaws.

Lucas wakes up trying to catch his breath. He quickly gets out of bed and rushes to his sister's room at the end of the hallway. He takes a quick look inside and see's she is still asleep. Her dreams not nearly as bad as his.

### *Max*

She lay in her bed, tossing and turning. She knows it won't be long. She looks to her closed closet door. Max knows he will be coming. He always comes.

The light in her closet comes on. Then the door begins pounding.

"Open the door Max." Her dead stepbrother says.

"OPEN THE GOD DAMN DOOR!" Billy shouts, slamming his fists into the door.

Max get out of bed and slowly walks to her closet door. "Billy, please, you're dead. Leave me alone." She says.

"Open the fucking door Max. OPEN THE DOOR!" Billy screamed. Max fell back and landed on the floor. She looked under her bed and the bloody face of Billy came out.

"I just wanted someone to care. And you were a royal bitch." Billy said, dragging her under the bed.

Max woke up screaming. Quickly she put a hand over her mouth. She hopes she didn't wake them up.

The door opening confirmed they did hear her as her stepfather Neil walked in.

"God damnit Maxine, I have had it with this hollering you're doing." Neil said.

Max was crying, she was trying to calm herself down. "Please, I'm sorry. I'll be good." Max begged

SLAP!

Neil's meaty hand connected with Max's face. "Don't lie to me girl. Keep hollering like that and I'll give you something to holler about." Neil said walking out of the room and slamming the door.

Grabbing her cheek, Max laid down and began sobbing.

*Steve*

He was running through the Russian base, they took his kids, and damnit he is getting them back. He rushed through, the hallways seemingly empty. Steve hopes his stubbornness and nail bat will be enough against soldiers armed with AK's.

He could hear voices coming from one of the rooms. He recognizes it as the one he was interrogated in. Holding the handle to his bat, Steve kicks the door in. He is greeted by absolute horror.

Robin is strapped to a table. Blood is coming out of her mouth, her chest is split open like she was being dissected. Steve shoves the doctor away and grabs Robin's head.

Tears sting as they come down his face. "I am so sorry. I failed." He said sobbing to the dead girl.

The door opens and in walks Frank Harrington, his father. He is taller than his son, and the physical features that Steve has is the same on him, but older. And his hair is slicked back, not the copyrighted hair that Steve has.

"Look at you. Can't even mount a simple rescue. Your even more of a disappointment than I thought." Frank said. He walked over and shoved him to the ground.

"The dyke was screaming for you to come. What was the delay boy?" Frank demanded.

"I found out...." Steve began but was kicked by his father

"Always excuses. Never a damn answer." Frank said, opening a door.

Inside was a freezer, Mike was holding El tightly to keep her warm. Sadly it was not enough as they were frozen to death.

"He kept telling her Steve would save them. And were where you?" Frank snarled, opening another door.

Max was on the ground with a gun in her hand and a hole through her head. Lucas and Erica hanging from the ceiling.

"She cursed your name as they strangled to death." Frank said,

opening another door.

Nancy and Jonathan were crying over Will's broken and beaten body. He wasn't moving.

"You should have been there for him, but my failure as a father shows you are as worthless as a tick." Frank said opening a final door.

Dustin was standing there, tears streaming down his face. Steve rushed in to comfort his friend.

"Dustin, it's ok buddy, I'm here to help" Steve said, wrapping his arms around him.

"They made me watch Steve. I told them you were coming, and they laughed as they killed them. You could have saved us." Dustin said. He shoved Steve away. Russian guards came in and grabbed Steve.

"Now to end my disappointment with you boy." Frank said, as they dragged Steve away.

Steve shot up from his bed. He quickly shoved his fist into his mouth to keep from screaming.

He looked at the clock. Three thirty in the morning. Like clockwork. He laid back down and hoping his parents were still asleep, began weeping uncontrollably.

Unknown to all the kids, their parents were becoming aware of something wrong with their children.

AN: What do you guys think? I will upload more since i have the first 5 chapters written.

## 2. Chapter 2

Ted Wheeler woke up to a strange sound. Carefully sitting up to not disturb his sleeping wife, Ted grabbed his glasses and carefully walked out of the room. The noise was almost a small shriek, something that had been frequently waking him up for the past several months. It usually came from his son's room or his eldest daughter's room. This time it seemed to come from both.

Ted walked slowly down the hall and checked in on his youngest. Holly was sound asleep, the stuffed dinosaur that Mike gave her was being cuddled for dear life. Ted gave a small smile as he closed the door. He looked in on Nancy's room and found the bed empty. Not unusual so much when Ted is woken up at three in the morning. He then made his way to Mike's room.

He heard them before he even reached the door. He heard two sets of sniffles and cries. Carefully Ted opened the door and peeked inside. The sight before him was heartbreakin.

Mike and Nancy were in the same bed, holding onto each other for dear life, sobbing quietly. They must have both had nightmares this time. Despite also crying, Nancy was sitting upright gently stroking her brother's hair. Mike was nearly curled into a ball. Despite almost clearing six feet, sometimes Mike could appear small.

Ted slowly closed the door and made his way downstairs. He went to the kitchen and poured himself a small glass of milk. He thought about how things started to change.

July 4th. The night of Kline's fair, when Starcourt burned. Ted was driving the family home when Karen saw the orange glow. Ted put it out of his mind and they went home. A few hours later they got a call to about how Mike and Nancy were at Starcourt. Ted barely remembered to put matching socks on.

Mike was inside of a hospital room comforting a girl he had never seen before. He later learned it was Hopper's kid, El. Nancy was with Jonathan in another room, the two resting from what seemed like a horrific ordeal.

A man in a suit explained what had happened. Mike was meeting his friends at Starcourt and then heading to the fair when the fire happened. The mall was closing so it was just Mike and his friends and a few innocent bystanders. The fire broke out and killed a few people. Billy Hargrove died saving Mike and Max from falling debris and Hopper was caught in an explosion.

It was traumatic to say the least, and when Joyce moved and took her kids plus Hopper's kid with her to Illinois, he understood. Hell he almost moved the family to Indianapolis but He didn't want to put more trauma on his children.

The nightmares didn't start becoming worse till a few days after the Byers moved. Ted noticed when he thought he heard a muffled scream. He went to check and found Mike in Nancy's room comforting her. The next night it had been Mike being held by his older sister. But often, it was the two comforting each other. It hurt Ted thinking their kids couldn't come to them for help, that they had to rely on each other.

He sat at the table musing when he saw Karen come down the stairs. Her eyes were still bleary from just waking up but she sits down next to Ted at the table.

"Your awake awfully early." She says. Ted merely nods. "I think I'm having problems sleeping while Nancy and Mike have problems sleeping." He says. Karen nods.

"I hear them to.... I didn't know you check on them also." She says. "Yea, I get worried. They haven't exactly had an easy few months." Ted says.

"More like a few years. I thought everything was teenage hormones or something but it seemed like Mike was grieving all this time. And Nancy has not been the same since Barb died." Karen said. Ted slouched his shoulders. He never noticed.

"I never noticed. I was to busy with work to see my kids were suffering." Ted says. He takes his glasses off to wipe a tear threatening his eye. Karen places a hand on her husband's arm.

"It's ok Ted. You keep a roof over our head and I kept the kids alive. That's how our parents did it right?" Karen says. But Ted shakes his head.

"We didn't know Mike was keeping a girl in our basement for christsakes. We didn't know Mike had a girlfriend! Nancy was being more of a parent than we were... than I was." Ted said. Karen sank her head down. It was true.

"Did we mess up somehow?" Karen asks. Ted shrugs his shoulders. "Well, we need to change things, something is wrong with our kids and we have our hands on our asses." Ted says. "I'll see about talking to Virgil later, see what he knows about what's going on." Ted says. Karen nods, hoping this will be a new change for them.

### *Sinclair residence*

Virgil Sinclair had no idea what was going on with his children. He thought he had a decent grasp of things, even if his son would rather be a nerd and play that pretend game with his friends instead of going for sports. Hell, even Erica started playing with them and that was worrying. Playing pretend wasn't going to solve their problems or get them ahead in life.

His wife, Pricilla, was laying next to him. He looked over and she was awake, having heard the noise coming from Lucas room.

"That's the fourth time this week." She said simply. Virgil nodded. "I noticed. It seems to have gotten worse when the Byers left." He said. Pricilla turned over. "What is going on with them?" She asked.

"I don't know. I tried asking Lucas how he was feeling and he seemed to dodge the question. And Erica is usually forthcoming, she is just as tight lipped as her brother." Virgil said. This shocked Pricilla.

"That's not right. Those two are never on the same page." She says. Virgil nods. "I thought about asking around the other parents, but I have a strange feeling they know as much as we do. Well, if Joyce were here she might shed some light, she was always close to her boys." Virgil says.

"I should contact Claudia and Karen, find out some information." Pricilla says. Virgil thinks about that. Of all the intelligence gathering divisions he has worked with, they had nothing on his wife and her friends gossiping. It honestly saved a few trials he worked on.

"Well, hopefully we can get an answer. I hate seeing our kids like this." Virgil says. Pricilla nods.

### *Byers Home*

Joyce is in El's room. She is holding onto her for dear life after yet another nightmare. She tried Will's room first but the minute he saw her, his screams got worse. Like Joyce was the source of his pain. It broke her heart seeing her son terrified of her. Luckily Jonathan rushed in and had that under control. Because a moment later, her daughter was screaming as well.

Joyce wasn't going to lie, she also was having nightmares, of the Russians, of Hopper. So she could sympathize with them. She was envious of Jonathan being so grounded. He seemed to be the one keeping them all sane.

She looks down at El, her newly adopted daughter. Joyce never thought she would be qualified to watch over her, but Doctor Owens assured her it would be fine. And the fact that Owens got them a "settlement" to buy a new home and somehow a really good well paying job as a secretary was making their living arrangements easier.

El was still crying but it was slowing down. The move was hard on her the worst. Living as an experiment for 12 years of her life, escaping, finding love and a family, only for it to be stripped away. Joyce blamed one man for all this, Martin Fucking Brenner.

If he hadn't taken El from her mother, she wouldn't have opened that gate and let that monster into our world, not attracted that other worldly god, not brought the Russians, not had her lose two men she loved. Oh if Brenner were still around she would make her displeasure known.

But for now she had a family to care for. And El needed her mother.

"Do you want to tell me about it sweetie?" Joyce asks. El shakes her head but begins talking anyway,

"Everyone I got killed, they blamed me. And Dad and Mike hurt me because I got people killed." El says through her tears. Joyce pulls her in tighter. "Sweetie, you know none of that was your fault. Bad things happen. And Jim, he made his own choice. He would have gladly died for you." Joyce says running her hand through El's hair.

"It's not fair though. You had Hop for a year and a half. You should have had him for longer." Joyce says. El keeps sniffling. Joyce looks up and sees Jonathan at the door. He indicates Will wants her. Joyce nods.

"Hey, Jonathan is going to sit with you for a bit. I need to check on Will." She said. El nods. "Ok Mom." She says and Joyce tries to keep her own tears from coming out.

Jonathan enters as Joyce leaves and he hears her eldest talking to her. Joyce readies herself for another distressed child.

She enters Will's room and the fear that comes in his eyes leaves as Joyce sits next to him.

"I'm sorry mom. The way you came into my room...I thought the nightmare wasn't over." Will says. Joyce puts an arm around her son.

"It's ok sweetie, I think you had that one before. It was the Mind Flayer right?" She asks. Will nods.

"I still feel him sometimes. Like we didn't kill it. But it's weak, to weak to fight again." Will says. Joyce nods, worried that monster will return and take more from them.

"Mom, I think I need help." Will says. Joyce stares at him. "I can't keep being afraid anymore." He says,

"Don't worry baby, I'll take care of it. I'll call Sam tomorrow." She says. Hopefully he will do some more to help her kids. Even the ones still in Hawkins.

*Henderson House*

Claudia could hear him. It was heart wrenching to hear her little Dusty upset and she could do nothing about it. She got out of bed and looked in on Dustin sitting up, holding Tews. That cat was a good source of comfort to her son, especially lately.

She could hear his soft sobs as he gently stroked the cat. "It's all my fault. Hopper's dead because of me." He muttered to himself. This surprised Claudia. The story was that Dustin and Erica Sinclair left the mall when the fire started and got help. How could Hopper's death be his fault?

It was the most she ever got out of Dustin. He became sullen and withdrawn lately. She at first thought it was teenage hormones, then the nightmares began.

She casually observed his friends as well. Mike looked like a ghost most of the time, Lucas was jittery, as if waiting for something to come out of every corner, and Max was suddenly wearing more layers. She remembered having to do that when Adam would get drunk with her.

Claudia left the room and headed to the kitchen. She decided she needed to do something. Tomorrow Steve Harrington will give her answers damn it.

### *Harrington residence*

Frank Harrington looked in as his wife was trying to pull their son out of whatever terror was gripping him. April was trying desperately to get her son to respond to her.

"Steven, please, it's just a nightmare." She said, trying to shake her son out of his terror.

"No, please, don't hurt them. Take me... TAKE ME." Steve shouted. Fred rushed in the room and helped grip his son.

"Steve, please. It's okay, everything is fine." Frank said, trying to get his son to see reason. Steve was still gripped by terror.

"Have to save them." Steve said.

April pulled Steve close, keeping him from moving to much. Soon, he calmed down and fell back asleep. April sat down with him for a few moments before leaving. Frank stared at his son, perplexed by the things he said.

He left the room and headed to his study and found his wife inside preparing two glasses of whiskey. He loved she could read what he needed. He gratefully took the glass and took a sip of the liquid.

"What the hell was that?" April asked. Frank shook his head. He had never seen Steve like that before. Hell, Steve never had nightmares. "Something is wrong here and its seriously pissing me off." April said. Frank was slightly amused how angry his wife got, then becomes the beacon of peace at city meetings. She was especially helpful to Kline when the city council almost removed him from office when the higher taxes on that damn mall almost bankrupted the city.

That damn mall, Frank hated that thing but it got Steve his first job. The fact he was working a summer job in a damn ice cream store instead of preparing for collage was a slight irritation to Frank. He had expected much from his son, and routinely he disappointed him. First his studies were abysmal. He thought getting together with Nancy Wheeler would be a good influence on him. After all, April was a good influence on him when they were young. Second was him dropping basketball and letting that new kid Billy Hargrove replace him on the team. And finally, Steve hanging out with kids. At first Fred thought he was mentoring them, one of them being Nancy's younger brother, but it became apparent he enjoyed their company more than his own peers.

Yes, Frank was disappointed in his son. But that did not mean he did not love him. And seeing his son in a fit of terror like that shook him to his core.

"Something happened at that fucking mall. And I doubt it was a simple fire." Frank said. April nodded. "I don't know how Steve got those bruises from a fall." April said. Frank remembered they looked very familiar, to last November when Billy Hargrove beat his face in. It looked like another beating. He first thought Hargrove beat him again, then he was told Hargrove died saving some kids from falling debris.

Steve was tight lipped about the incident and it seemed he only opened up to those kids or Robin Buckley, a girl he met at work. Frank remembered her mother, and remembered he was slightly still scared of Beatrix.

"I will see if I can get a hold of any of the mayor's aides that are not currently in prison." April said. Frank snorted, most of Kline's staff was arrested and were waiting for sentencing while Kline was sent to supermax. That was confusing since all he did was use cheap contractors. That was a thread he would explore another day.

"I will see if there is anything that we can do. I am very worried about our boy." Fred said. April nodded while drinking her glass.

### *Chicago*

Martin Brenner, former head of Hawkins Lab, former researcher for MK Ultra, and current fugitive, received the best news. His former patient, Subject Eleven, had been spotted in Springfield. He looked at the pictures and sure enough, it was her. Her hair was longer and she was slightly older but he knew she would turn up. He thought about checking Hawkins but the town was being watched by Owens, that traitor.

Sam Owens had been a rival of his for years, with Sam disapproving of Brenner's methods. But now he will have the last laugh. He had a lab set up with other scientists, most from places that used torture as way of science. They will be useful in breaking her of her rebellion.

Brenner walked out of his safe house after calling his lab. He looked at the picture of Eleven and frowned. "Her hair is so pretty, be a shame to shave it off." Brenner mused to himself as he started his car.

The car didn't start and it left Brenner confused. He looked around and saw him standing on the street corner. Sam Owens had found him and gave him a little wave. Brenner realized that it was all a trap, right as the car exploded, finally ending him.

"Well, that was easier than I thought." Sam said, talking to a scarred man in a black tactical outfit.

"I traced the call as well, I'll deal with his lab next," He said to Sam. He merely nodded. He hated that he used Jane as bait to lure out Brenner, but he made a promise to Jim that he would give her a normal life. And getting rid of Brenner was just one way to do that.

AN: As always please read and review and tell me what you think.

### 3. Chapter 3

Mike woke up snuggled to his sister. In the past, he would have been disgusted at sharing body contact with her, but she was the only person in the house who understood. She fought the same monsters he had, and was lost without her love. Mike says the design for the upgrades to Cerebro were so Mike could call Will and El easier, but he also wanted to let Nancy call Johnathan more. He owed Nancy that.

For once she looked peaceful. Not having the burden of having Barb invade her dreams. Mike hated that. He remembered he used to have a crush on Barb when he was younger. She introduced him to more books than just Tolkien and Lewis. And as a bit of an embarrassing memory, she took him to see the Dark Crystal. The embarrassing memory brought a rare smile to his face.

Nancy slowly stirred and while still barely awake ruffled Mike's hair. "Morning sleepy head." She said. Mike laughed and he untangled himself from the covers. Nancy got out as well and headed to her room. "You get the bathroom first Mike, you need to get ready for school." Nancy said. Mike nodded and grabbed his change of clothes and walked into the bathroom.

Downstairs Karen and Ted were getting things ready for the day. "I'll go get Holly up." Ted said as he put his newspaper down. This surprised Karen as usually he never voluntarily woke the kids up. Ted made his way up the stairs and roused Holly from her peaceful sleep. Seeing how his youngest was the only one not effected by the tragedies of the past few years made him more determined to be a better father.

Ted walked out so Holly could change out of her pajamas and could hear Nancy in her room. He walked over and gave it a soft knock.

"Come in." She said. Ted walked in and saw his oldest still in her own pajamas but gathering her clothes.

"Sleep well Nancy?" Ted asked. Nancy gave him a smile and nodded. "Yea, oh I got a call from the paper, the new owners want to meet

with me." She said. Ted smiled. He was glad Nancy still wanted to be a reporter. She was always good at ferreting out facts. "That's great. I'm glad that's working out." Ted said. Nancy nodded, she was legitimately happy that the newspaper found new owners. Hell, a lot of businesses' had started returning once Larry Kline went to jail. She might do a piece on that if given the chance.

Ted walked over and hugged her. She returned the hug, surprised her dad was showing this level of affection. He then whispered to her. "Your mother and I are worried about you both. We want to help you, Jus please let us in." He said. Nancy looked up at her dad and the worry on his face was obvious. She wanted to tell them, hell Mike wanted to tell them, but it was unbelievable even to them. Monsters, government conspiracies and super powers. Nancy felt guilty keeping things from them, but she remembered the threat she had received from those agents after the Demogorgon was killed. She just couldn't risk them. She already hated her own brother was at risk as well.

"I know dad. I'm sorry we haven't been close with our lives. I'll try to be better about it," Nancy said. She heard the shower turn off and she made her way to the bathroom to wait for Mike to leave. Ted made his way to Holly's room and walked her downstairs.

### *Byers House*

Joyce got out of bed feeling like she did not sleep a wink. It was probably true, with two of her kids having the worst terrors possible. She was grateful to Jonathan helping her out. She got out of bed and smelled the coffee pot going off. He must have gotten up early. Her heart sank, thinking how her oldest was keeping everything from crashing down. She walked in and found a cup on the counter. Jonathan was up looking confused. Joyce looked over and saw it was Will and El making breakfast. She grabbed her cup and walked over to Jonathan. "How long have they been at it?" She whispered. "I just woke up ten minutes ago." Jonathan whispered back.

"Ok, so once your done scrambling the eggs, we put it on a plate like so." Will said, allowing El to put the eggs on the plate. Will then went to make sure the bacon was ready. Somehow everyone in the family liked their bacon crispy. She guessed Jim liked his bacon that was as well. Joyce smiled, Will seemed to have problems with El when she

seemingly returned from the dead, mostly because of the amount of time she spent with Mike. She guessed her circumstances for her living with them was bad enough so he spent a lot of time helping her learn things.

It was also why both Will and El were currently being homeschooled. El just wasn't ready for school and Will offered to help tutor her to catch her up. Dr. Owens found them a program that was highly recommended so it all counted when they did eventually go to school. As the pair began putting food on plates to set the table, they saw both Joyce and Jonathan staring at them with amused looks on their faces.

"Oh don't mind us, we just found that to adorable to interrupt." Joyce said. Both of them blushed as they placed the plates of bacon, eggs and sausages. Jonathan walked to the coffee pot and poured himself a cup. "When did you learn how to cook?" He asked. "Sometimes Mrs. Wheeler would let me and Mike help when I would stay over." He explained. Joyce smiled, she was glad that despite her growing problems with Ted she still made time for her kids. Then again, she couldn't hate Ted either, she was grateful to him for scaring Lonnie off when he broke Will's arm in a drunken rage.

Joyce grabbed some plates and motioned for the kids to sit down. "So, how did that meeting at the photography agency go?" Joyce asked her oldest. He made a sour look. "That guy was a creep. I told him thanks but no thanks." He said. Joyce didn't inquire further but gave him a look that said this wasn't over.

After breakfast, El and Will began working on their lessons while Joyce headed out to work. Jonathan stayed behind to look for jobs. While Joyce was making good money, Jonathan wanted to pursue his dream of being a photographer.

Hours later, Joyce found herself at her favorite diner for lunch. It was a nice little pub that served the best burger she had since Benny died. She walked to her usual table and found someone sitting there. It was Dr. Owens.

"Hello Joyce." He said nonchalantly. Joyce gave him a smile and sat down with him. "I am guessing you got my message?" She asked. "I

did. Sorry I didn't answer, I was doing pest control." Sam said. Joyce gave him a look. "What kind of pest control?" She asked. She knew he did more than just research for the government if he was able to call in an armed strike force. Sam gave her an easy smile. "One that keeps your little girl safe. I found Brenner." He said. Joyce sank in her seat. She breathed a sigh of relief. She always feared the day that monster would show up and take an of her kids. She worried about it while Jim was still alive. But knowing the monster was gone made her breath easy.

"That's a huge relief. I shouldn't be glad about a person's death but I have been paranoid he would turn up and take her. Especially since she can't defend herself." Joyce said. Sam nodded. "How is she doing? I think I have been focusing on so many things I forget she is still a grieving child." Sam said. Joyce lowered her head. "Her nightmares are getting worse. Her and Will are getting worse. I just dunno how to handle it." She said. It felt good to not have to be strong for once. Sam nodded. "I can make a few calls. The department I work for has a few people who can talk to them. I want to make sure everyone gets the help they need." Sam said. He was talking about helping El and Will out but he was also hoping Joyce would accept counseling as well.

"Thanks Sam, I'll talk to them after work. I don't know how well El will take this but she needs help." She said. Sam nodded again and the pair ate their food in peace. When it was done, Sam paid the bill and Joyce went back to work.

### *Hargrove House*

Neil Hargrove left the house early, wanting to get an early shift at the plant. Susan didn't have to go to her receptionist job till later, so she went to check on Max. She looked down at her and her heart broke. Her face was still streaked with tears. A bruise was developing on her face that Susan will have to help conceal. She was also cuddled up to one of Billy's jackets.

She wondered how often Billy's antagonizing of his father was more to keep him away from Susan and Max. He always seemed to show no outward affection, but he always seemed to start something when Neil was getting on her case about something petty. Once she burned

a part of a casserole and Neil seemed to be losing his temper, Susan was afraid he was going to strike her when Billy just out of the blue began playing rock music at full volume. It made Neil forget about the burned piece of casserole. After that, Susan was grateful to Billy's wild nature.

Max though, she never thought her step brother's death would affect her much. They had an antagonistic relationship, he seemed outwardly cruel. But that day last November seemed to change that. He gave her a wide berth. In turn, she was a little more respectful to him. A little more than she was to Neil, who had made it clear he disapproved of her dating Lucas Sinclair. Susan regretted going along with him, mostly because Lucas was a respectful young man and she liked his parents. But Neil was an old school racist, and hung out with old school racists. Susan hated them. She hated him. But she felt trapped.

"Maxine, honey, time to get up." Susan said, gently shaking her daughter. Max stirred awake, her red hair wild all over her face. "C'mon, I need to put some concealer on you." Susan said. Max nodded and followed her into the bathroom.

It wasn't to bad of a bruise, but she still needed to hide it. She was afraid of what Neil would do if authorities showed up. She was afraid she didn't have the courage to leave him. She put the concealer on and hoped it would not be noticed. Max gave her mother a grateful smile and the pair went to the kitchen.

Max made herself some oatmeal while Susan fixed herself some toast while also making the two of them lunch.

"Mom, are you okay?" Max asked. Susan looked down and her hands were trembling. She didn't realize it at first but her sandwich was slightly ruined. Her nerves must have been worse than she thought.

"Yes, I'm okay darling. Just having a bit of nerves." She said, putting her sandwich in a bag. Max looked down, fidgeting with her oatmeal. Susan frowned. She walked over and carefully hugged her daughter. "I am so sorry baby. I should have known something was wrong with him." Susan said, stroking Max's hair. "It's not your fault Mom. I didn't think he was this bad either." She said. Susan kissed the top of

her head and the pair got ready for the day. Max biked off to school and Susan headed for her receptionist job for the construction firm that came to town in August.

Mr. Akechi was a stern man in his early forties. He was also built like a man in his early twenties. Susan and a few of the other girls often looked amazed at him. He paid them no mind but was very protective of them. He once threw out one worker because he cat called one of the younger receptionists.

Susan parked her car by the office and headed in. She made her way to the desk and greeted her coworker and began work. She mostly screened calls or she went and made Mr. Akechi coffee. Twenty minutes before her lunch break, his secretary came out with an apologetic look on her face. "He wants to see you." She said to Susan. Susan looked confused and walked into his office. He was sitting at his desk. "I am sorry Mrs. Hargrove. I need you to run these to city hall. I realize you were starting lunch soon." He said. It was sweet how he cared about their well being. He handed her the forms and she made a quick run to the city planning office.

The city council was trying to revitalize the downtown area. She hoped it worked. She grew to hate that eyesore of a mall since July 4th. Susan began filing the forms and made her way back. She decided to take her lunch break late when the office problem showed up. John Simmons, a foreman for the company who thought he held authority over the receptionists. "Your lunch was over twenty minutes ago Hargrove. Why do you think your so special?" He sneered.

"I had to..." She began but was interrupted. "I don't want to hear excuses. You need to take your lunch at the right time." He said, slightly raising his voice. Susan shrank down, she didn't know how to deal with this right now. The other receptionists were equally scared of him. He lowered himself. "You know, I see that girl of yours with that boy. They should be careful, bad things happen when girls mix with those people. Now you better do better if you don't want to mourn another kid." He said. Susan sat their shocked.

"WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?" Mr. Akechi shouted from the doorway. Simmons stood up. "Oh, sorry sir, just keeping the

receptionists in line." He said with a laugh. "Mrs. Hargrove is the head receptionist. You have no business in here." He said. Mr. Akechi towered over Simmons, and also had at least a hundred pounds of muscle on him. "Well I also needed to..." He began but Mr. Akechi stopped him.

"Don't think I didn't hear you threaten her child also. Get out of here before I call the police." He snarled. Simmons laughed. "Oh you think you will get anything done without me chink?" He said. "Those are more of my men. They won't work for some slanty eyed punk." He said shoving him. Mr. Akechi did not move.

"Get out of my sight NOW!" Akechi said, as he grabbed Simmons shirt and flung him out the door. The other workers gathered to see Simmons on his ass. "What are you staring at. He just attacked me. Everyone walk out." He said. The workers made no move to leave. "Why don't you walk out punk. Mr. Akechi is a better boss." One of the masons said. Simmons was confused. He thought he was liked better than the man in the suit. The other workers grabbed him and promptly threw him off the property. Mr. Akechi came out just in time to see Simmons run out of the area.

He pointed at the senior welder, a man named Harrison. "I will have you be the new foreman till I decide to make it permanent or hire someone else." He said. The man nodded and began rallying the men back to work.

Mr. Akechi walked in and saw Susan still shaken. "I am sorry for Mr. Simmons. I had no idea he was such a racist." He said. Susan's hands were shaking, almost trembling with fear. Akechi grabbed her hands and tried to steady her. "Mrs. Hargrove, please." He was almost begging. The sound of his voice shook her out of her terror. "Sorry, Mr. Akechi. The way he threatened my daughter.... Oh god she has been through enough already." She said. Tears were welling in her eyes. Mr. Akechi nodded. "Go ahead and take an extended break." He said. She nodded before they noticed he was still holding her hands. He let go and the pair blushed before Mr. Akechi went to his office.

Henderson House

Claudia waited for Steve to arrive, she sat outside her house while

Dustin was eating breakfast. She saw his BMW drive up and park behind her station wagon. Steve walked out of his car and made his way to Claudia. He looked worse for wear also. "Hey Mrs. H." Steve greeted her. Claudia fixed him with a stare. "He had another one last night." She said. Steve stopped in place. First his parents were talking about sending him to therapy for his night terrors, now Mrs. Henderson was noticing Dustin's own bad dreams.

"I dunno really what to tell you Mrs. H. But we did see some messed up stuff at that mall." He said. "Why does he blame himself for Jim Hopper's death!" She said pointing a finger at him. Steve was taken aback by the accusation.

"I really don't know, it was a bad night. Hell I barely remember all the details." Steve said. Claudia was not convinced but also had no proof at the time. "We will discuss this later." She said and walked inside. She liked Steve, he was a good influence on her boy. But this was slowly making her lose trust in him.

"Hey Steve." Dustin greeted excitedly. Steve smiled and ran his hands through his hair. "Ready for more high school fun?" He said. Dustin laughed but nodded. The pair got in Steve's car and he began driving out. Steve did not miss Mrs. Henderson glaring at him.

"Dude, what's going on with my mom. She usually likes you." Dustin said. Steve looked at him, "You blame yourself for the Chief's death?" He asked. Dustin lowered his head. "I should have known Planks Constant. I just couldn't think of it. I should have done better." He said. "Your best friend was being chased by something from an old sci fi movie, and we had a hell of a few days in that Russian base. You did amazing under those circumstances." Steve said. Dustin shook his head.

"Mike hasn't really talked to me. I think he blames me." Dustin said. "Ok, if he does, screw him. But I am willing to bet, he has his own issues as well." Steve said. He hoped he reached Dustin a little.

The Hawkins Post

Nancy arrived after breakfast. She made it in at the newspaper thirty minutes before she was supposed to arrive. She saw Murray's car in

the parking lot as well and she walked in. She made her way to the editor's office and found Murray sitting at the editor's desk.

"Mr. Bauman, you bought the paper?" Nancy asked. Murray looked up and gave her a wide smile.

"Yup, I figured I could keep an eye on things here." He said motioning for her to sit. She took the seat.

"Well, lets see, you were the receptionist here before." Murray said. Nancy nodded, losing heart.

"Yes, I can make some coffee, and I can get lunch for everyone." She said, Murray put a hand up.

"I don't need a receptionist. I already hired one." He said. "Mr. Collins, please enter." He called. One of the senior editors came in, a sour look on his face. "Yes Mr. Bauman?" He said through gritted teeth. Murray gave him a wide smile. "Can you go get me and Ms. Wheeler here a couple of cups of coffee?" He said. He grumbled and walked out.

"He is the reason I called you. He said get that fine Wheeler girl so he could stare at you. So I made him a receptionist and you will be my new reporter trainee." Murray said. Nancy was blown away. She was slightly flustered.

"Thank you so much. I am a little blown away." Nancy said. "Well yes, I am glad. Your first assignment I need you to do some small fluff pieces. I'll give you something good if these are good enough." Murray said handing her a list of assignments for her to write. She was excited. So much so, she gave Murray a hug and ran out to start work.

"I wonder how long it will take till she realizes she forgot her notepad?" Murray asked with an amused look on his face.

### Hawkins High Cafeteria

Lucas sat at the Party's usual table, Max was in the bathroom, touching up her concealer. He really wanted to do something to that asshole Neil Hargrove. Sadly Lucas was still not as strong as he could

be, and Neil was built like a tank.

Mike came in and sat next to him. Lucas noticed he was looking worse for wear. Dustin arrived shortly and gave them both a wide smile. "So Mike, did you get a chance to look at the specs for the radio relays?" Dustin asked. Mike nodded. "I think though a major issue is power. Cerebro's batteries won't last with the extra power." He said. Dustin slapped his face. He forgot about that. "Sorry Mike. Shut I forgot about that." Dustin said.

"It's ok man. We'll figure it out." He said. Mike was worried about Dustin. He hoped he didn't make Dustin feel worse. He thought about it and thinks some of his teasing might have been a little mean.

Max arrived and hugged Dustin from behind, then kissed Lucas. She gave Mike a nod who returned it. The two of them were still not the best of friends but they were trying.

"Oh look, it's Hawkins High freak show." Came the voice from Troy Walsh. Mike rolled his eyes and glared at them. "Oh joy, the comedian club." Mike said. He wasn't in the mood.

"Well we are missing one, guess the fairy flew off?" Troy said. "Can you come up with better jokes? You sound worse than in elementary school." Lucas said. Troy glared at him and was about to say something when he was shoved away. "Hey, why not find something else to do besides be a waste of space." Robin said as she rolled over to them. Troy and James walked away giving her a glare. "Wow, you would think how often he harasses you he might like you." Robin said.

She sat down with them and pulled out her own lunch. "So, I have to work this weekend and mom wants me to mow the lawn. I'll give you guys some free rentals if you can help me out." She said. Dustin shook his head. "I have to mow my own lawn." He said. "Yea, and me and Max have a project to work on." Lucas said. "Ok, I'll take care of it." Mike said. Robin breathed a sigh of relief. "Thanks, I'll get you some free rental vouchers." She said.

Mike gave a slight smile. He usually volunteered to help more lately. He felt he had a lot of stuff to make up for. They ate in silence and

left once lunch was over. As they left, Mike walked up to Dustin. "Hey man, I'm sorry if I have been a dick to you. I have been kind of a shitty friend." He said. Dustin smiled. "It's okay man. Just haven't felt right lately." Dustin said and shook Mike's hand.

AN: I reread this and found i kind of ended it suddenly. I remember i wrote it in a few hours and i had to go to work. I am still pleased with the end result. As always read and review. I look forward to hearing from ya'll

## 4. Chapter 4

### *Hargrove house*

"Where is she?" Neil demanded when he entered the house. Susan looked up from the pasta she was cooking and gave him a questioning look. "She is studying at the library I believe." She said. Neil slammed his hand on the kitchen counter. "No, that lying little slut is with that damn porch monkey." He said.

"Neil can you please stop calling Lucas..." Susan began but Neil shoved her into the wall. "I don't need no lip from you either. You tell that bitch to stop fraternizing with that boy if she knows what's good for her." He said and then stormed off to the bedroom. Susan began to compose herself. He must have had another bad day. Either that or someone of a different color gave him an imagined slight.

Susan went back to making dinner when Max returned, carrying her school bags and looking ragged.

"Nobody told me that the teachers were sadistic once high school started." Max said as she sat at the table. Susan smiled that she was at least safe. She looked at her and saw she still had heavy bags under her eyes but the bruise Neil gave her had already faded.

"So, tomorrow I need to work with Lucas on a class project." Max said. Susan nodded as Neil came out of the bedroom.

"What the hell is this I'm hearing? Your working on homework with that boy?" Neil all but shouts. Max jumps in surprise. "Yea, we are assigned to do a project...." Max begins as Neil pulls the back of her hair.

"You need to stop mixing with that boy if you know what's good for you. Pretty white girl like you could end up bad for mixing with them." He snarls. Max grabs his hands to fight him off and is slammed to the floor.

"Lucas is a good guy Neil." Max says as she gets up. "Well if he is so good, he better keep his hands off what ain't his." Neil says.

"I don't belong to anybody!" Max shouts. "I like Lucas, and if you can't accept that you can go to hell!"

Something in Neil snaps and he grabs Max by the back of her shirt and throws her into a wall. He rushes to punch her but she ducks and he punches the wall. He doesn't seem fazed and tries to attack again.

Max makes a run to her room and locks the door as Neil begins pounding on her door. "You open this door." He shouts. It felt familiar to Max and she freezes. Neil keeps pounding on the door.

"OPEN THE GOD DAMN DOOR!" He shouts. Max wants to run out the window, get away before she is hurt, but the way Neil is speaking takes her back to that night in the pool, with Billy in the sauna.

Max rushes into her closet and hides. She should have left out the window but where would she go? She didn't want her friends facing Neil.

"Maxine you open this door before I break it down." Neil said, calmer but with the same amount of rage.

Max held her breath but soon she heard breathing in the closet with her. She turned her head and saw black ooze dripping out of her step brother's mouth.

"Maxie!" He hisses and lunges at her.

Max wakes up screaming. She puts her hand over her mouth quickly to silence herself. Hoping to keep Neil from coming in and hurting her. Her door opened and she expected the worst. Instead she found herself in her mother's embrace.

Susan stroked her hair and tried to soothe her. The past week had been like this. Susan looked and saw the marks on her daughter. Luckily it was getting colder and she could wear long sleeves. Susan saw herself in the mirror on the desk and her own black eye was sticking out like a sore thumb. It was going to be a sunglasses day.

*Hawkins High*

Max sat at a bench by the bike rack, waiting for her friends. She left a

bit earlier than normal so she could get away from Neil. He was drinking more, and also hanging around with his new friends, a bunch of assholes that seemed to think Civil Rights was optional. They all had problems with minorities in Hawkins, but Neil seemed to really hate Virgil and Pricilla Sinclair. Probably because Virgil was a well respected lawyer and Pricilla was on the city council while Neil was a factory worker who thinks he is always getting passed up for promotions because he is white and not because he is a foul tempered jerk.

She looked up from her musings to see her friends riding up, she gave a small smile, always glad to see her boys.

They all looked tired, probably more so than normal. Dustin was the most obvious, looking like he had seen more ghosts. He struggled with his backpack, which was jammed packed with books on radio construction and maybe electrical engineering. Mike helped him and even took a few of the books himself.

"Ok, so how about after I get done at the Buckley's and you are done with your own yard work, I'll come by and we will work on this together?" Mike asked. Dustin nodded, having some relief from the massive text books that he was carrying.

"Hell, it might be easier if you guys shared the books instead of making Dustin into a donkey." Max said as she gave Lucas a kiss.

"I tried but Dustin was not stopping." Mike said. Dustin looked sheepish as he somehow pulled more books out.

The Party made their way to the library to return at least half of the books Dustin borrowed. They kept the ones that Mike and Dustin deemed useful for their radio tower project. "So stalker, where are we meeting up for our project?" Max asked.

"Well I was thinking the library, then go to that new Golden Dragon place for lunch then maybe my place to finish?" Lucas said. They both had a History project and while Max enjoyed spending time with him, she was slightly nervous about Neil finding out and retaliating.

"Well let's hope Neil minds his own damn business. I dunno why he hates you so much." Max said. "He is probably still mad segregation ended." Mike said. The entire party was not fans of Neil, even before they suspected him hitting Max and Susan. The Party then separated to head to their homeroom classes.

Max made it to the cafeteria first, she found the table and began pulling out her lunch. She usually waited for Lucas but she was starving. Breakfast had to be quick since Neil was hung over. Max hated that they had to be afraid of him. He was just a big bully. She started eating when a few girls approached her.

"Your Maxine right?" The blonde haired one asked. Max wanted to roll her eyes but she decided to be polite and nodded her head. "I prefer Max." She said. The blonde nodded, "Well I'm Julie. I heard you were at the mall when it happened." She said. This time Max did roll her eyes. She hated being asked about that day. First the government asked her what happened, then they had to lie about what actually happened. Luckily that Dr. Owens was an expert at crafting bullshit stories.

"I really don't want to talk about it." Max said. Taking a bite from her sandwich. Julie gave her a small smile. "No, I don't want to question you about that. I just wanted to say sorry. Your brother sounded very brave." She said. Max looked at her confused. Sure sometimes people would tell her the usual platitudes, but so far the supposed popular crowd never came to give sympathy.

"Yea, he was. He saved my life." Max said, she hated the lie. Billy didn't save them, but he did die a hero.

"Well, would it have been too much for Wheeler to get crushed instead?" One of the girls asked. Max looked up at the offending voice, a brunette with a stuck up face. Max glared at her. "Excuse me?" She asked, a dangerous tone to her voice. Even Julie was slightly put off by the comment.

"Well, your brother was kind of hot and Wheeler is just a giant dork. Nobody would miss that." She said. Max got up, really wanting to give her a piece of her mind.

"Listen here bitch, Mike Wheeler is one of my friends. You don't speak badly about him or to him or I will kick your scrawny ass from here to fucking Indianapolis." Max said in a growl. The other girl looked to her friends for support but none of them were amused by the comment.

"He and I have problems but he has been a kind and loyal friend. You should be lucky to have friends like Mike Wheeler and Dustin Henderson. Now get out of my face because my friends are coming and they don't need bitch energy effecting them." She said. Julie grabbed her friend's arm before she could retaliate and gave her a glare. The girl backed down.

"Sorry Max, I honestly wasn't looking for a fight. But I am glad you care about your friends." She said and the group walked away. Mike was the closest, and he had an uncomfortable look, probably not used to hearing anyone compliment him. Max sat back down and resumed her sandwich. Lucas came up to her and gave her a stare.

"So, what was all that about?" He asked. Max blushed. "Just one of them decided to be bitchy." She said and gave him a slight kiss. Dustin sat down next and had a dopey grin. He still looked like he hadn't slept for days but happy Dustin was best Dustin as far as Max was concerned. And finally Mike, already uncomfortable that Max even said a nice thing, was more uncomfortable about seeing her and Lucas kissing, but he showed his kindness in his own way. He pulled out his lunch and handed half of his sandwich to Max.

"I can never finish these." He said. Max knew he was lying. That boy could put away groceries at the rate he was growing. But she accepted the food regardless.

Robin joined them, getting a few more glances of a senior sitting with freshman. She didn't care, Robin liked her little shits.

"So my strange child friends, hope ya'll aren't finding this to overwhelming." She said. The group grimaced.

"Well between homework and our radio project, I am beat." Dustin said. Mike nodded, he would be great when they could get the problem with making relay stations working. He missed El a lot and

their weekly radio calls were the only thing keeping him going.

"Yea, cause homework is what is keeping you guys up at night." Robin said. She tried to make light of their shared trauma as she called it. It also helped her. Robin rarely spoke about the Soviets, and never wanted to remember the Mind Flayer.

"Yea well, I'd rather do homework than sleep." Lucas said. Max nodded, although she hated being awake also. Robin pulled out her own lunch and the group ate while cracking jokes at each other.

### *Akechi Construction*

Kiryu Akechi was usually the first one at the office. Many wondered if he ever slept since he seemed to arrive before the morning workers. He liked to tour his various construction projects. Today he made his way to a project over at the iron works plant. Kiryu passed by several workers, most looked at him with confusion. He supposed Hawkins didn't have a huge Asian population.

Kiryu was not keen on Indiana, but with the troubles he was having and his sister needing to leave Osaka, he supposed beggars can't be choosers. He headed to the manager's office.

After the rather dull meeting, Kiryu headed to his car and found several men standing around it, mostly admiring it. "Who knew the chink could make bank." One of the men said. Kiryu rolled his eyes, not even close to in the mood for this. John Simmons had been by the office to harass him, calling him all manner of names. He went to the city several times to have his contract revoked but luckily they saw reason, and also he was becoming the biggest employer in the county.

"Excuse me, I need to get to my car." Kiryu said, rather forcefully. One of the men, whose name tag was faded and he couldn't see looked at him and squinted his eyes. "Oh yes sir, we no mean to cause twuble." He said in a mocking accent while bowing several times. Kiryu stepped by him and shoved him away, more forceful than he expected and he fell on his ass.

"Did you see that? He just attacked me!" The man yelled. Kiryu

looked at the man and lowered himself to him. "I am sorry sir, but I did not attack you. If I had, you would be needing more than a hospital." Kiryu growled while helping the man up, giving a strong grip on his arm. The man nodded and ran off once he was on his feet.

Kiryu headed to his office afterwards. His anger began slipping away as he saw his head receptionist's car in the parking lot. He smiled at the thought of her. He would sometimes just stare at her hair. Red was his favorite color. He parked his car just in time to see Susan walking to the office door carrying a few massive boxes. Kiryu ran forward and helped grab a few of the boxes. "Thank you" She said as he helped open the door.

Susan was the first one at the office, the other receptionists would show up in a few minutes. Kiryu noticed she was wearing her sunglasses indoors, and wearing long sleeves. Granted it was mid October so that wasn't out of the ordinary.

"I'll get the coffee on." Susan said. Kiryu nodded and headed to his office. A few minutes later, Susan entered with a cup. She still had her sunglasses on. Kiryu liked seeing her eyes. But he shook his head, needing to be her boss.

"Are you okay Mrs. Hargrove? Your still wearing your sunglasses." He pointed out. She got nervous, clearly hoping nobody would point it out. "Oh, I fell yesterday and have a black eye. I don't like people assuming my husband beats me or anything." She said. Kiryu grimaced, he remembered his sister explaining the same thing.

"Well, hopefully you don't have any accidents." Kiryu said, making a mental note to see Mr. Hargrove.

### *County Clerk's office*

Frank Harrington was on a mission. After another terror set on his son, Frank decided he needed to see about what happened at that mall. The way Steve was acting, he reminded him of a friend of his who was captured in Vietnam. They were not kind to him.

He made his way to the office of the County Clerk, the only one from Kline's administration not forced out or in prison, and banged on his

door.

The rather frazzled Clerk, a bespectacled man named Henry, meekly opened the door. "Frank, what can I do for ya?" He asked as he was disturbed by the stone faced Frank Harrington.

"Yea, you can start with something that has been bothering me for a little while. Where did Larry get funding for that mall? And don't say private investors, none of us put any capital for that eyesore." Frank said, getting into Henry's personal space.

"Well, as far as I knew it was private investors. Larry never let me in on things. I mean, you had to have noticed I am the only one not in jail after that fiasco." Henry said. Frank was not happy with that answer.

"Something happened in that damn mall and it has my son in fits of terror. Now I know you're a sneaky little shit and you know more than you let on. Now tell me who paid for that mall!" Frank shouts.

"Yes, I assume the insurance agency is still looking into the causes. I tell you Frank I really know nothing." Henry said. Frank grumbled, he sounded genuine.

"Well, no wonder then you are still here." Frank said as he left. Henry watched as he left the office before he grabbed his phone.

"Sir, Frank Harrington just came in and asked me about Starcourt. Wanted to know where Kline got the money." Henry said.

"What did you tell him?" The voice asked him,

"Nothing sir, he seemed to buy I knew nothing, But sir, I don't think this is over. I see the children that were at the mall and its only a matter of time before the parents figure it out." Henry said,

"Leave that to me." The voice said as he hung up the phone. Henry looked at the door Frank had left through. He hoped his boss didn't hurt him.

*Wheeler house*

Ted came home early, surprising Karen as he walked through the door. "Ted, your home early." She said as Ted gave her a peck on her cheek.

"Yea, I decided to have a short day today. Mike and Nancy home?" He asked.

"Mike is doing homework and Nancy is still at work." She said. Ted nodded. Holly was watching cartoons, barely noticing he was home. Ted smiled at his youngest. "Well at least she's entertained. So, do you need anything done around here Karen?" Ted asked.

Karen wasn't shocked by that, Ted usually tried to get things done before dinner. "Well, not now but Mike mentioned he is mowing the Buckley's yard tomorrow. I have to take Holly to a doctor's appointment and I don't want Mike trying to take the mower to that house tomorrow by himself." She said. Ted nodded, he could get that done.

"I am going to check on him. I'll see you in a bit." Ted said as he headed up the stairs.

Ted finds himself at his son's door and gently knocks and is given permission to enter. "Hey son, how's homework?" He said.

"Um....fine. Just a little much right now." Mike says. Ted notices how tired he is. "Need any help with anything." He asks. Mike shakes his head. "No, I have the hang of it. Thanks though." He says.

Ted decides to bite the bullet, he needs to see if he will open up. "Mike, have you been getting enough sleep?" He asks. Mike looks up from his paper and grimaces. "Well, homework has been a pain. And me and Dustin have been working on a special project so we can contact Will without climbing to that hill." Mike says.

"Lot of work to keep up with a friend." Ted muses. "Wouldn't also wanting to be trying to contact that girl Joyce took in also." Ted smiled as his son went beet red. "Um...a little." Mike mumbles.

"Well she was a very pretty girl. And don't think I didn't see how close you were at Jim's funeral. How did you two meet?" Ted asked.

Mike had a ready made story, Hopper had helped him craft it for when El came out of hiding. "She was the Chief's daughter from a relationship he had years ago. Her mom got sick and couldn't take care of her. Hopper went to Mrs. Byers to introduce friends to her and Will brought us over. We got along and then the fire happened." Mike said. He really didn't want to tell his dad he had been secretly dating Hopper's daughter. Hell he didn't want to tell his dad he was dating.

"Well, I know your going to Springfield in November, so hopefully Will and them can come over for Christmas. I'll talk to Karen about them coming for the whole break." Ted said. Mike perked up at the idea, he only suggested Christmas day, but a couple of weeks with his friends would probably lift his spirits.

"Ok, well I'll let you get back to it. Hey, tomorrow I'll take you to the Buckley's. Your mom doesn't want you lugging the mower. Also, I'll pick you up when your done." Ted said.

"Ok dad, um also when I get done, can I stay at Dustin's? He and I need to work on this project and it would be easier than on the radio." Mike asked. "Only if your mom and Mrs. Henderson approve." Ted said. Mike was relieved. "Thanks dad." Mike said and went back to his paper.

Ted left the room, glad he could talk to his son. He just wish he had been a bit forthcoming, but he wasn't doubting progress.

### *Family Video*

"So, you want me to host you and Mike at my place tomorrow night so you can work on the Cerebro project?" Steve asked. Dustin gave a smile and nodded.

Steve pinched the bridge of his nose. "Well, your parents aren't usually around on weekends and well Mike and I need to talk a little more open." Dustin said. Steve nodded, he understood the secrets were driving them all crazy. It's just Steve wasn't to crazy about Mike. It's not like he hated him, but Steve always felt Mike was a little bit of a selfish control freak. He heard Dustin talk about how if a campaign wasn't going right, Mike tended to get huffy.

Also it was a little awkward to hang out with his ex's little brother. Although him and Nancy were good friends, sometimes it got weird. Mike picked up on this and tended to stay out of Steve's way. That suited Steve fine.

"Ok, I'll do it. Luckily dad doesn't seem to mind me mentoring two freshmen." Steve said. Dustin breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hey Harrington, I need you to process some returns real quick." Keith called from the register. Steve nodded and headed to the counter and grabbed the stack of movies.

"Sorry Keith, just Dustin needing a work space." Steve said. Keith nodded and when Steve was done processing the return for Smokey and the Bandit, he took it from Steve and rented it out to the customer.

"Yea, I get you. Oh, this weekend you need to expand on your fantasy movies. I set aside Krull and Conan for you." Keith said. Steve perked up, he remembered Dustin talking about those. Speaking of Dustin, he saw the boy heading for the door, waving at him.

Steve kept working, thinking things might be picking up.

### *Sinclair House*

Virgil came home from a very long day. Court appointments, meetings with the DA, and then another run in with Neil Hargrove. Virgil swears he spends more time harassing him than he does at work.

He supposed he would still have problems with Neil even if Lucas wasn't dating Max. He sighed, he hated that his son put up with that because he cares for the red head. Speaking of the redhead, Virgil noticed her backpack by Lucas'. He looked in the living room and found them both on the couch, papers on the coffee table and the two of them making out. Virgil was proud of his son, but needed to have a little fun.

Standing far off, Virgil loudly cleared his throat. Hearing the two fumble and get into opposite ends of the couch made him laugh.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything?" Virgil said as he came into the living room. Max's beet red face and Lucas' swollen lips gave them away. "Just doing homework dad." Lucas said.

"Ah yes, homework. Well I hope inspecting Max's tonsils helps with your grades." Virgil said, he was laughing. Lucas ducked his head in embarrassment.

Dinner was a more jovial affair at the Sinclair house. Max and Erica double teamed in embarrassing Lucas. "You know I can dig up your baby album." Erica said. Lucas eyes narrowed. "I know where the video of you singing Madonna is" Lucas said.

"Show anyone that and your dead nerd." Erica snapped. It was good natured but sometimes Virgil and Pricilla needed to reign them in. "Children, calm yourselves or I'll put you in The Shirt." Virgil said. Max was curious. "What is that?" She asked.

Pricilla got up from the table and came back to the dining room with an over sized shirt. She grabbed Erica and sat her on her brother's lap and put them both in the shirt. The glowering they both were giving had Max laughing so hard she fell off her chair. Virgil got up to check her and saw her shirt had come up slightly and he saw he bruises along her abdomen. He kept that silent as he helped her up.

After dinner, Virgil helped his wife with the dishes. "I saw bruises on Max. those are not from her skateboard." He said. Pricilla nodded. "I have seen how that man treats Susan and Max out in public. It doesn't surprise me if he does worse at home." She said.

"I'll try and talk to Susan tomorrow. Might see if there is a shelter they can go to." Virgil said.

"I don't know. Also there is no telling what Neil might do if Susan left him. We need to approach this delicately." Pricilla said. Virgil agreed. "Well, it doesn't feel right with her going back. She can stay here," Pricilla said.

Virgil was surprised, she was usually a bit traditional about Lucas and Max, but even he made a few allowances.

That night, screams erupted from the guest room. Virgil and Pricilla were out the door when they saw Lucas rush inside. Entering the room, they saw Max screaming in hysterics. "BILLY STOP! GET AWAY FROM ME!" She screamed. Lucas was trying to get to Max but she was thrashing wildly. Virgil and Pricilla rushed over, despite her flailing Virgil was able to get a grip on her. Lucas joined him and put his arms around her.

"Max, it's okay. He isn't here. You're with me." Lucas said. She began calming down and her eyes shot open. She began crying into Lucas. "Lucas, I'm sorry. He came back and he hurt me." Max was crying. Virgil and Pricilla left the guestroom to let Lucas tend to her

Virgil looked at his wife, concern was radiating off of her. "We need to find out what happened at that damn mall." She said.

an: i am glad you guys are enjoying this.

"

## 5. Chapter 5

### *Byers House*

El woke up from another nightmare. It was the same one she had since they moved to Springfield, one where the everyone blamed her. She would sometimes see her dad looking disappointed in her whenever she looked in the mirror. She got out of bed and headed for the kitchen for a glass of water. Walking to the kitchen, she was surprised to see Jonathan at the kitchen table. He looked up at her and smiled.

"Hey squirt, your up late." He said. El smiled at him. "Can't sleep." She said grabbing a glass from a shelf. Jonathan nodded. "Lot of that going on." He said. She felt guilty, hating that Joyce and Jonathan would lose sleep because of her nightmares. She had gotten good about no longer screaming, but usually without fail, Joyce or Jonathan would check on her or Will.

"What are you doing?" She asked him. He pulled out a chair and motioned for her to join him. She sat down and looked at the papers around the table. "I am planning on going to college at the local community college. They have a great photography program there." He said. El was always fascinated by college, but she felt she would never get in due to her education being lacking. "This looks like a lot." She said.

"Yea, it can be. You should have seen the stuff Nancy got." Jonathan said. He had a small frown thinking of Nancy. El felt bad, more things for her to feel guilty of. Jonathan picked up on that. "Hey, it's all good. We are still planning on them coming here at the end of November." He said. El couldn't really help feeling guilty anyway. To her it felt like everything was her fault.

Often she wondered if it was better if she wasn't around. She feels like her whole presence just brings misery. So many were dead because of her. These thoughts often came for her. And because Jonathan is empathetic, he picks up on her melancholy train of thought.

"You know, I sometimes feel Barb's death was my fault." He said. El looked up in surprise. He was never open like this. "I was taking pictures outside Steve's house, when I saw the Demogorgon. I thought I was just really tired and didn't think anything of it. But when Barb went missing, and I saw it in the developed photos, I just felt like I should have said something." He said.

"But, it wasn't your fault. It was mine." El said. Jonathan was surprised by that admission. "I opened the gate, I let it through. All those deaths were my fault." She said. Jonathan pulled her into his arms.

"No, it is not your fault. You didn't open that gate because you wanted to, you were forced to. Those bastards made you do this. You were just as much of a victim as Barb was." Jonathan said. El cried for a few minutes, mulling over his words. She thought about it and was trying very hard to accept that her Papa was more responsible for their deaths than she was.

She remembered Joyce telling her that he was dead now. She didn't go into details but a part of her was glad he was gone. El lived in fear that he would come back for her, and people she cared about would die to protect her, but the knowledge that he is gone forever gives her a small amount of hope.

"I feel a bit better now," She said. Jonathan smiled and kissed the top of her head. She giggled a little and headed for her room after putting her cup in the sink. As she made her way to her room, she stopped at Will's and checked on him. He was still out like a light, something she was glad for. El closed his door and fell asleep, this time dreaming of better times.

### *Wheeler house*

Karen was cooking breakfast while Ted was helping get Holly ready. It was a welcome surprise when Ted started taking a more active role with the kids. His naps on his chair have been fewer lately. She heard two people coming down the stairs and Karen looked over to see Mike and Nancy heading for the table.

Mike was grabbing the milk and orange juice out of the fridge while

Nancy grabbed the plates. A year ago this would have been a shouting match between the pair. Karen felt bad that a tragedy had to bring the two to the same team. Karen thought about Billy and his family. She had seen Susan at the store, looking a lot like how Joyce looked before Ted threw Lonnie out one Thanksgiving. That ensuing confrontation was the reason Holly was born. Karen told herself she would look out for Susan and Max, because Karen was not putting up with that shit in her town.

As she began putting the breakfast on the table she could hear Ted talking to Holly down the hall. "Ok, show them your big girl pants." Ted said. Karen looked up, which caused Mike and Nancy to look over just in time to see Holly walking in, wearing a pair of Ted's sleep pants. They were so large on her, her head was barely sticking up from the waist. Karen carefully put the pan of sausages down before she began laughing hysterically. Mike and Nancy joined in as Holly walked in, a triumphant grin on her tiny face.

"I get to wear the big pants today." Holly said as she entered the kitchen. Mike picked her up and sat her on his lap. "You certainly do Holly." Mike said hugging her. Nancy leaned over and began tickling her. Mike barely registered the camera flash as Karen took a picture of the siblings. Mike didn't care, he was glad to have a genuine laugh for a change.

The phone rang and Ted answered it. "Hello, Wheeler residence." He said. "I don't think anyone is happy early in the morning." Virgil said on the other end. Ted chuckled. "Well yes, I'll show the picture later." Ted said.

"I look forward to it. Listen, I called because I need a favor. Max stayed over last night and she had a son of a bitch of a nightmare." Virgil said. Ted nodded. "Is she okay?" He asked. "Yea, she's fine. But she was crying that Billy was coming after her. Correct me if I'm wrong but didn't he die saving her?" Virgil asked.

"Yea, that's what we were told. But I have had my suspicions for a while." Ted said. "Yea, same here. Meet me at Starcourt tonight. I think we might find some answers. And also, see if we can keep Max from home. The less she is around Neil, the better." Virgil said. Ted agreed. "I'll see what we can do." He said and hung up the phone.

Luckily his family didn't hear him on the phone.

After breakfast, Ted and Mike began putting the lawnmower in the back of Nancy's station wagon. She entered the garage ready for work. "Um Dad, I kind of need to go to the paper today." She said sheepishly. Ted grabbed the keys to his BMW and tossed them to her. "I need your car for later when Mike is done at the Buckley's" He said. Nancy looked shocked that her dad was letting her borrow his car but the shock wore off and she grinned as she got in his car. "Bye Dad, Bye Mike, have fun." She said as she drove off.

### *Buckley House*

Ted pulled up to the curb and helped Mike pull out the lawnmower. As they got it set up, a man in his mid-30's arrived from the house. He had brown hair combed back and a goatee. His glasses hung loose on his face and he greeted them warmly. "Hello, Ellison Buckley. You must be Mike." He said shaking his hand. "This is my dad Ted." Mike said motioning to Ted. The two shook hands. "Call me when you want me to pick you up." He said as he gripped Mike's shoulder and he got in the car. As he left, Mike looked at the yard, it was fairly large, larger than his own. The house was a nice beige two story home. It was near the farm land so the yards in these parts were big.

"Yea, should be a few hours work. I would do it but I have a writing project due. Now, just go inside if you need to use the restroom. Don't enter the back yard though, that's my wife's garden and she doesn't usually like visitors back there." He said. Mike nodded and he began setting up as Ellison walked inside.

Mike was mowing for half an hour, the hum of the mower drowned out by his headphones of his Walkman as he listened to his Led Zeppelin tape. He was enjoying the work, not having to care about the things that bothered him. He kept working till he noticed what felt like rocks were being thrown at him. Mike turned around and saw Troy and James at the edge of the property laughing. Mike rolled his eyes and kept working. They weren't going to cause anything serious at someone else's house.

He found out how wrong he was when he found himself tackled to the ground by James. As he went down, he let go of the mower's

handle and the mower stopped. Mike tried to fight back but James was much bigger than him and he began striking Mike's face. "GET OFF OF ME." Mike shouted. James turned him around and slammed his face into the ground. He then sat on him and held his face to the ground.

"So, frogface is doing labor for more freaks? Man what is this world coming to?" Troy sneered as he took Mike's Walkman and listened to what he had on. "Fucking Led Zeppelin, I always thought you had shitty taste in music with this fag band." He said as he began pulling the tape out of the cassette. Mike noticed James was wearing a Led Zeppelin shirt.

"Might wanna rephrase that dumbass." Mike said. Troy responded by kicking him in the face. "Shut the fuck up. Nobody wants to hear from you." He said. Troy then grabbed Mike's hair and began slamming his face more into the ground. Troy noticed how much hair he had gripped and a wicked grin came to his face.

"Ya know frogface, you could use a haircut." He said. He motioned for James to head to the lawnmower. Troy flipped Mike on his back and sat on his chest and arms. He used his arms to hold his head in place. "Just a little off the top." He said as James started up the lawnmower. Mike began struggling, getting a few more punches to his face. He could see Troy laughing as the mower was slowly heading to the top of his head. Fear started to grip Mike as this was the second time Troy tried to kill him. And this time El wasn't here to save him.

As the mower came close, Troy found himself flung off of Mike and onto the ground. James looked up just in time to see a blonde woman deliver a swift kick under his chin and knocked him back. Mike looked and saw her. She was wearing a loose flannel shirt that was covered in dirt. Her jeans were also caked in dirt. Her blonde hair though was striking to see. Her piercing blue eyes were raw with fury.

Troy got up and pulled his knife out. As he turned to face his attacker, a large katana was pointed at his face. "I warned you about coming here boy." Her husky voice said, bridled with fury. Troy tried to smile as he put his knife away.

"We were just playing around. Me and James thought he could use a haircut." He said. Her eyes narrowed and she grabbed him by the front of his shirt and bent him over her knee. Using the flat end of the sword, she began spanking Troy. "Something your mother should have done more of." She said. As she finished she threw Troy to the ground. James got up and found the blade pointed at his face.

"You want some more boy?" She sneered. James shook his head. "Good, take him and leave." She said. James grabbed Troy and the two ran off. "I'm telling my mom what you did you freak bitch." Troy yelled as he ran off. She had a brief laugh as she sheathed her sword. She looked over at Mike, still on the ground and in slight shock at what he just saw. Her face softened at seeing his face was bruising.

"C'mere, lets get you patched up." She said pulling him up. Mike was led to the porch and he sat on the stairs. She walked inside and a few moments later her and Ellison came out. "You okay son?" He asked as he began cleaning the blood off his face.

Mike gave a good natured smile. "Yea, happens all the time." He said. Ellison looked to his wife and both gave concerned looks. "Um Mike, I am reasonably sure that you would have been hurt really bad by that." He said. Mike shrugged, for him this was normal.

"Well, I don't think we should have met like that, but I'm Beatrix Buckley." The blonde woman said as she sat on Mike's other side. He shook her hand but he noticed he had a slight tremble. Beatrix noticed Mike's face was betraying him as tears were welling up.

A moment later, Troy was returning, this time with his mother. Sheila Walsh was stomping towards them, fury etched on her face. Ellison looked at his wife. "I got this." He said and she nodded at him.

He got up and met them halfway. "Your freak of a wife put hands on my son." She shrieked. Ellison rolled his eyes. "Did your son mention he was using the lawnmower on that boy over there?" Ellison asked and indicated to Mike. She scoffed.

"He did no such thing. Besides, that boy is trouble. Should have died in that fire and saved us all problems." She said. Ellison was not surprised by that. She almost ran over Robin and her response was

culling bad seeds was beneficial.

"Well, regardless, your son and his delinquent friend had no right on my property. My wife was just defending our home." He said. "And really, you want to say a child deserved to die in a fire? That's just low." Ellison added.

"Well, regardless of that, your beast of a wife should not have touched my son." She said. Ellison stepped forward and got in Sheila's face. "Let's not beat around the bush, your son is an asshole that you keep coddling. He comes on my property again and I will shoot him, am I fucking clear?" Ellison said. Sheila nodded her head weakly and walked away, dragging Troy with her.

Mike watched the confrontation. He never saw anyone threaten Mrs. Walsh before. Usually people rolled their eyes and shooed her away. "I guess that's a common thing around here?" Mike asked.

"Yea, She's still mad I kicked her husband's ass back in the seventies." Beatrix said. "He was being rude to my daughter." She explained. Mike nodded and Beatrix resumed cleaning his face of dirt and blood. Mike was used to doing this himself, trying to keep his problems away from his family. Even Nancy never saw how often Troy would beat him up. It was nice not to worry for once.

Once she was done, she gave Mike a tight hug that Mike accepted. He got up and went back to the lawnmower. He picked up his Walkman and his destroyed tape and grimaced as he put it in his pocket. He then resumed his work.

A couple of hours later, he was finished and he was proud of his work. He went to the house and Ellison came out with his keys. "I dunno if you want to tell your dad about earlier." He said, offering to take him home. Mike grimaced but nodded. They loaded the mower into the back of the truck and as Mike was about to get into the passenger seat, Beatrix showed up.

"Thank you for your help." She said and hugged him. Mike didn't notice her place an envelope inside his pocket but Ellison laughed at how quick she was. She let him go and the pair drove off. "You mentioned you're a writer, what do you write?" Mike asked. Ellison

smiled a little. "True crime. I studied criminal psychology in college and loved reading old case files. I spend a lot of time traveling to various cities interviewing people about old cases. Sometimes my books reopen cold cases and might bring some closure to the families." He said. Mike nodded, impressed. "Yea, I just write Dungeons and Dragons campaigns." He said sheepishly.

"Hey, you gotta start somewhere. I doubt Tolkien started the Hobbit without writing a few small novels first." He said. Mike nodded, happy someone also reads Tolkien. They pulled up to Mike's house and as they were getting the mower out of the truck, Ted came out of the house.

"Hey, I thought I was going to...." Ted started and then he saw Mike's face. "Michael, what happened?" He asked sternly. Mike looked down, not wanting to talk about what happened. Ellison saw this and grimaced. "Hey Mike, let me talk to your dad a moment, ok?" Ellison said. Mike nodded and Ted walked around the truck.

"That kid, Troy Walsh, attacked him. My wife scared them off but kid has to much pride to talk about it." Ellison said. Ted grimaced as well, he looked over at Mike and thought about how often his son had been dealing with things alone.

"Well, thank you for helping him out. God I hate that Walsh boy." Ted said. Ellison nodded in agreement. Ellison got in his truck and Ted went to check on Mike. He walked in through the basement and found him sitting on the couch. Ted felt horrible for him, and also he really wanted to give Sheila Walsh a piece of his mind.

"Hey son, hows it going?" He asked. Mike just shrugged, still in pain from earlier. Ted sat down next to him. He could tell Mike was keeping himself from crying, pride that he won't do this in front of his dad. Ted put his arm around him and Mike let go. Ted couldn't remember the last time he saw Mike cry, not even after they were found in the middle school gym. Sure, he was upset but he never cried. The few times he caught it when he checked on him and Nancy was heartbreaking to be sure but Mike left very little evidence.

"It's okay son, it's okay." Ted said.

## *Hawkins library*

Max sat at the table in the back while Lucas put the books up that they used for the day. Their history project was coming along nicely, a study on post World War 2 developments, had challenged them. Max wished she could call her grandpa, he remembered a lot of post war stuff easier, but the assignment said they couldn't call relatives. They made decent headway on their project before hunger overwhelmed them and they decided to break for lunch. As she put their things in their backpacks, she saw Lucas heading towards her, carrying a couple of books that they deemed useful for home. "Hey, you think we can stop by my mom's job? She works extra on Saturdays and I wanna check on her." She asked. Lucas nodded. "Yea, we should do that." He said.

The short ride to the construction office was relatively peaceful. Max noticed her mom's car was in the parking lot. They headed for the gate when a security guard stopped them. "What in the hell are you doing here?" He asked. Max laughed, she met him before. "I am just checking on my mom." She said. "I am with her." Lucas said. The guard laughed. "Wait right here." He said. He returned a moment later and placed a hard hat on their heads. "Don't walk onto a site without proper headwear. Boss's orders." He said as he let them through.

Heading into the office, Max saw her mom at her desk, filing away paperwork. Susan looked up and she smiled as her daughter walked to her desk. "Sorry for barging in mom. I wanted to check on you." Max said. "Well, it's a good thing you did Maxine, I was worried about you." Susan said as she hugged her daughter. Lucas noticed Susan wincing as she was tightly hugged.

"Lucas, can you wait outside, I need to talk to Max about something." She said to Lucas. He nodded and headed out the door.

Lucas stood by the bikes and looked on as the workers hustled and hustled about. Lucas hoped he could get a part time job this summer. He tried to reason with his dad for a regular part time but his mom stepped in that conversation and told him to focus on studies.

His thoughts went to Max. He was sure he was in love with her,

especially with everything she was dealing with making her stronger in his eyes. Now he wasn't planning on telling her in a moment of heat like Mike did for El, but he hoped to drop that one soon.

His musings were interrupted as Max came out of the office. Slight tears in her eyes. Lucas looked at her and she gave him a look that said 'later'. They got on their bikes and headed away, towards downtown Hawkins and toward The Golden Dragon.

It was a relatively new place, opened up around the same time Mr. Akechi brought his firm to Hawkins. The pair put their bikes by the rack and entered.

They were greeted by a woman at the counter, she was about Susan's age. She was wearing a red dress and had the name tag of Reina. "Hello there, welcome to the Golden Dragon." She warmly welcomed them. "Oh, so young. It's nice to see you come to my humble restaurant." She said. Max and Lucas smiled at her as she led them to a nice table.

"Are you ready to order?" She asked them as she brought their drinks. They both nodded. "I'll go for the chicken ramen." Max said. "I'll go for the Takoyaki." Lucas said. Reina raised an eyebrow. "You are aware that it's octopus, correct?" She asked. Lucas nodded. "My dad tells me to try new foods." He said. Reina nodded and walked off.

"So, what happened with your mom?" Lucas asked. Max took a deep breath. "Mom told me Neil was not happy I stayed over at your house and he has been on the warpath. I was told not to come home for a few days till he calmed down." Max said. Lucas heart hurt, the fact she couldn't go home because of him was hurting him. "I am so sorry Max. This is my fault." He said. Max grabbed his hand and fixed a fierce stare at him.

"No it is not. Lucas, I chose to be with you knowing what kind of a man Neil is. And I would do it again. Despite all of out ups and downs you guys made it bearable in this town and I am not losing you just to appease Neil." Max said. Lucas smiled. He felt the urge to tell her, right then and there. But he held it back, now wasn't the time. "Luckily I left backpacks of clothes at ya'lls houses. So, hopefully I can couch surf for a few days." Max said. Lucas laughed a

little. He hid her backpack with Erica, telling her about why Max left it. For once his sister did not object.

After lunch, the pair were about to head back to Lucas's house when Max went ghost white. Lucas looked over and saw Neil standing outside his truck, looking angry. He walked up to them and was making fists.

"Maxine, you didn't come home last night. Where were you?" He asked in an almost snarling tone. Max was shaking. Lucas got between them. Neil smiled as he did so. "Oh so you think you can do something about this boy?" He asked, emphasizing 'boy'. Lucas glared at him. "You know, where I come from, boy like you and a girl like her usually the both of you end up in shallow graves." He said. "Or maybe I get that sister of yours and see if anyone misses her." He said. Lucas snarled and punched Neil in the face. It surprised him and he fell over.

"Let's get out of here." Lucas said as he grabbed Max's hand. She nodded and the two ran to their bikes and found the tires were slashed. "Mother fucker!" Lucas yelled and they ran for it. They heard Neil's truck start up and they ran into an alley way to cut around before he saw them. Lucas looked and saw the Hawkins Post office and saw Nancy walking inside. "Cmon, we can hide their." He said pointing to the building. Max nodded.

They ran across the street, narrowly avoiding traffic as they made it inside. "Nancy!" Lucas shouted. The other reporters and editors looked at the pair with irritation but Nancy looked up and rushed to them.

"What's wrong, did something happen?" Nancy asked. They both nodded. "Neil is after us, he threatened to kill us and also threatened my sister." Lucas said. Nancy's eyes narrowed, she was beginning to really hate Neil.

"Cmon, I can hide you guys here." Nancy said and the pair breathed a sigh of relief. She took them to the conference room and noticed it wasn't used. "You two stay out of sight. I don't want a fight here." She said. They nodded and hid away from the windows.

She was headed for her desk when she heard him. "I know they are here, now you bring them out so I can teach them some god damn manners!" Neil was shouting. Mr. Collins was staring at him with a blank look, clearly not wanting to deal with this shit. "Sir, no children came in here, now can you please calm down and leave before I call the police." He said. Nancy was surprised, she thought he was still mad at her for his demotion to receptionist.

Neil looked and saw Nancy. "Look, that whore over there is friends with that porch monkey, she is hiding them!" He yelled. Neil did not take notice how many people were now glaring daggers at him. Collins had enough of this. "That woman is out junior reporter, and she has been doing a damn good job around here. Now I will ask nicely one more fucking time, get out of my god damn office!" Collins shouted. Neil did not move. When Collins made a move for the phone, Neil pulled the phone line out. "I am not leaving without those two." He said in a low voice. He looked over at Nancy. "Now, you bring them out or I will hurt you badly." He said. Nancy glared at him. "They aren't here dumbass." Nancy said. Neil stalked towards her. "I know they are here, now do I have to wreck this place before I find them?" He said.

"Well you can try, but all you will find is maybe my employee's feet up your ass." Murray said as he exited his office. The shouting man was disturbing his work. "Now, I do believe we told you to leave." He said. Neil rounded on him and fixed a glare on him. "I do believe I said I wasn't leaving without my stepdaughter and that monkey she hangs out with." Neil said. Murray pinched the bridge of his nose.

"You must get along great around here." He said. Neil didn't care. "Fuck off beatnik" Neil said. Murray was now losing his patience. "Ok, I guess we do this my way." And he punched Neil in the face. Again Neil fell to the ground, not exactly expecting it and not planting his feet. Murray then grabbed the back of his shirt and dragged him out. Collins came around and grabbed Neil's feet and the pair threw him out of the building. "Come back in and I call the cops. Now get." Murray said.

They walked back in and found the staff applauding them. Murray gave a dramatic bow. "Okay Collins, you did good. I need you to be my editor again." He said. Collins nodded. "Thanks Mr. Bauman." He

said.

Max and Lucas carefully exited the conference room and made their way to Nancy. "Thanks, we didn't know where else to go." Max said. "Don't worry, that asshole isn't touching you guys. And once my shift is over I'll take you guys home." Nancy said. Max looked down. "You think you can take us to Steve's?" She asked. Nancy wasn't surprised and nodded.

### *Harrington House*

Steve was watching TV when the doorbell rang, he got up and Mike was at the door, he had a bag with several snacks in them and was wearing his backpack. His face had several bruises and cuts. "Mike, I know lawnmowing isn't your thing but you have to keep the blades away from your face." Steve joked. Mike winced at the joke, Steve wasn't far off to what almost happened. "Is Dustin here yet?" Mike asked. Steve shook his head. "No, he called and said he will be a little late, but come in." Steve said as he motioned him inside.

They sat in uncomfortable silence in the living room, watching MTV. "So, where are your parents?" Mike asked. Steve shrugged his shoulders. "Mom said she is working late and Dad said he was going to be working on a project. They won't be back till early in the morning." Steve said. Mike nodded and went back to the tv. Steve looked over and saw how uncomfortable he seemed.

"So, you going to tell me what happened?" Steve asked. Mike wanted to say no, to tell Steve to mind his own business. But the note he received from Mrs. Buckley was not only ten bucks but a bit of advice. She told him that he didn't need to do it alone, it was okay for him to ask for help.

"Troy and James attacked me at Robin's house. They tried to mow my hair off." Mike said. Steve's eyes went wide. "Oh what the fuck now?" He asked. Mike nodded. "Mrs. Buckley scared them away with a sword, but I kinda deserved it." Mike said.

Steve never got along with Mike, that was an established fact between them. It stemmed from when Steve's friends wrote a degrading message on the Hawk. He understood the animosity, if he

had a sister and someone did that he would be fuming also. Steve also couldn't help but see a little of himself in Mike. This though was something new. Steve always thought Mike was being selfish but in reality it seemed like he was punishing himself.

"Why do you say that?" Steve asked. Mike shrugged. "It was my fault the party split up. I was keeping El to myself, I was neglecting my friends, I was just a giant jerk." Mike said. Steve slapped him upside the head. Mike glared at him. "Yea, your right, you did all that stuff. But you learn. I see you working with Dustin in your free time, and don't think I didn't see you buy more batteries for Cerebro the other week." Steve said pointing at him. Mike nodded, he felt if he was using it he should help maintain it.

"Look Mike, you made a few mistakes, but that's fine. What matters is if you learn from them and try not to make the same mistakes. And that makes you a better person in the long run. You need to let go of your guilt. But also keep being helpful cause next week I need help with my gutters." Steve said. Mike laughed and nodded his head. "I'll see if Lucas can help." Mike said. Both laughed as they knew Lucas had a strange fear of heights.

Dustin arrived a few moments later. He was very sheepish. "Mom is working overnight and wanted to know if I could stay here." He asked. Steve shrugged his shoulders. "Hell, let's let Mike stay and we can gorge on this junk food Mike brought." Steve said. Dustin smiled and gave his mom a thumbs up.

Mike and Dustin took over the living room and Steve decided to make them all some food. It seemed like he and Mike were finally having an understanding with one another. While he was cooking he could hear Dustin and Mike talking. And for once it wasn't technobabble.

"Again? Jeez won't Troy just give the fuck up." Dustin asked. Mike shook his head. "He seems determined to see how far he goes before he ends up in prison." Mike said. Steve nodded his head from the kitchen. He chased those two assholes away on more than once occasion this year alone.

"Remember when they put the knife to me and had you jump off the

quarry?" Dustin asked, laughing. Mike equally laughed. 'the fucking what now?' Steve thought. "Yea, if El didn't catch me I would have been a goner." Mike said. The pair were laughing but Steve was seething with rage.

"So what happened today?" Dustin asked. "Oh, they wanted to use the lawnmower to cut my hair. I mean, Nancy says I need a haircut but I think they would have taken more off the top." Mike said. Dustin laughed with him. Steve had so many questions now.

Steve made a massive pot of spaghetti, mostly because he expected more people to show up. And show up they did. Nancy showed up with Max and Lucas, both looking like they had a long day. Nancy looked in and saw Mike with bruises and cuts. She was about to question him when Steve pulled her into the kitchen. He told her what Mike told him. Nancy was very shocked.

"I am going to kill so many damn people." Nancy said. Steve agreed. "Say, did Mike ever tell you about when Troy made him jump off the Quarry?" he asked. Nancy shook her head. "No, this is the first I am hearing about this." She said. Nancy was now stressed out. Steve noticed and hugged her. "Look, it's okay." Steve said as Nancy began crying. "Fuck Steve, I almost lost my brother and he never told me about it." She said. "I think he hides a lot from everyone." Steve said. Nancy nodded, it was true, she didn't really notice he was depressed for a year. But she was caught up in her own problems.

She looked out in the living room and all of them were laughing and joking. She smiled to herself. "Hey, I'm telling Mom you're staying here. You be good." She said ruffling his hair. Mike rolled his eyes good naturedly and returned her hug. Nancy left, and she had a plan to deal with Troy later.

The party sat around, working on their various projects. "Man, if we could ask Dr. Owens for help, that would be cool." Dustin said. Mike nodded. "Yea, but I think he has like government work to do." Mike said. Dustin nodded.

As they worked, Max began humming. Dustin recognized it and was close to rolling his eyes. But he soon found himself humming. Soon all four of them were humming, till Mike decided to take it up a

level.

"Turn around  
Look at what you see  
In her face  
The mirror of your dreams" He began singing. Lucas followed suit

"Make believe I'm everywhere  
Given in the light  
Written on the pages" He sang. Then all four began.

"Is the answer to a never ending story  
Ah

Reach the stars  
Fly a fantasy  
Dream a dream  
And what you see will be

Rhymes that keep their secrets  
Will unfold behind the clouds  
And there upon a rainbow  
Is the answer to a never ending story  
Ah  
Story  
Ah

Show no fear  
For she may fade away  
In your hand  
The birth of a new day.

Rhymes that keep their secrets  
Will unfold behind the clouds  
And there upon a rainbow  
Is the answer to a never ending story  
Ahahah ahahah ahahah..." The party sang. Steve finished them out in a surprise entrance

"NEVER ENDING STORY!" He sang off key. The party began laughing loudly and rolling on the floor. Steve was happy seeing his kids

amused.

The party ended up asleep in the living room after they all watched Krull. Steve gave them all blankets and he himself went to sleep.

The next morning, Steve woke up early to check on the kids, he made his way down to the living room and found them all still in the same positions, but he found his parents standing watch over them.

"Hey mom, hey dad, ya'll are back." Steve said sheepishly. Both his parents turned around and his mom pulled him into a bone crushing hug. While Steve appreciated this, he was curious as to why. Then he saw a thick envelope in his dad's hand. "Steven, we need to talk." He said holding up the file.

AN: Okay, so this is all caught up on . I have a bit of a problem now. I have been trying to write both Hardware and this by swapping them out. I have been trying to write chapter 6 of this story but somehow the ideas i have are not panning out. I hope i can get the next chapter written and we can all have fun.

## 6. Chapter 6

### *Harrington House*

Steve grumbled awake as the early morning sun hit his face. It felt like he had just fell asleep. He stirred in his bed and noticed an extra warmth in his bed with him. Steve looked over and saw a woman in red hair sharing his bed with him. A small smile came to his face as he saw it was Barb. She rolled over and slowly opened her eyes. "Hey honey." She said sleepily. Steve smiled and gave her forehead a kiss.

She smiled at him. "Did you sleep well?" She asked. Steve nodded. "It's easy to sleep with you next to me." He said. She smiled and snuggled up to him. "The kids should be downstairs." Barb said. Steve rolled his eyes, they tended to show up all the time.

Steve got out of bed and took a shower, when he got out a while later, he could hear sounds coming from downstairs. He smiled as he heard them all calling for breakfast orders that Barb was receiving. He opened the door to the dining room and stopped dead in his tracks.

The dining room was covered in vines, the very air was thick with the sickness that came from the tunnels. At the table, he saw his kids all around, dead with vines jammed in their mouths. Barb was walking around, fussing over the kitchen.

"What happened here?" Steve asked. Barb stopped and looked around, smiling. "Oh this?" She said looking at the dead at the table. "This is your life. You failed to save them." She said happily. She shook on Dustin, his cold grey skin falling off as he slumped over. "They all died because you couldn't protect them. Hell, you failed to protect me." She said. Steve shook his head, no believing the horror in front of him. "Believe it pretty boy. This is all your fault. While you were with your whore, I was getting killed by that monster." She said.

Steve tried to run away but when he left the dining room, he found himself back inside the dining room. Barb's laugh echoed through the room. Dustin's rotting corpse sat up. "You didn't do enough to save us." He said. Vines began wrapping around Steve as the kids got up

and shambled towards him. Barb, now grey and rotting, was standing over him. "Now you wallow in your failure." As vines wrap down his throat. Mike and Will start pulling on Steve's legs and Steve felt his limbs coming off. His final sight was the Demogorgon leaping on him and biting his face.

Steve woke up screaming. His father stormed into the room moments later, quickly heading to his son. "Steve! What's wrong son?" He asked gripping his son into a tight hug.

"Its my fault. Its all my fault!" Steve said. Frank was trying to calm him down but he was gripped by absolute terror.

It took him a few moments before Steve calmed down. It felt like he was just waking up after all the screams. "Steve, what was your fault?" Frank asked. Steve was still catching his breath. "Barb Holland. It was my fault she died." Steve said. Frank was confused. "Son, she died from some leak from that lab. That wasn't your fault." He said. Steve shook his head. "She was here. I wanted to be alone with Nancy and left her out here. I should have done something." Steve said.

"Son, you made a mistake. What matters is you learn from it and try not to make it again." Frank said. Steve nodded and slowly fell back asleep. Frank sat with him, making sure no more nightmares returned. Frank got up and left the room and headed to his study.

April came in moments later, watching her husband take another drink of bourbon. "Another bad one?" April asked. Frank nodded. "He thinks Barbara Holland's death was his fault." He said. "That's more than we have ever gotten out of him." April said. Frank nodded. She sat at a chair across from him as he poured her a glass.

"Listen, I need you to handle that dinner appointment with Mr. Akechi. I have a few things to take care of tonight." Frank said. April nodded. "Is this something I should wait for you at the office later?" She asked. Frank leaned back in his chair before answering. "Yes, I plan on breaking into Starcourt tonight. The things Steve says when he is in his terrors worries me and also makes me wonder what is going on." Frank said.

"Let's hope what answers you get can help Steve out." April said.

### *Sinclair House*

Priscilla stood in the entryway to the guest room, watching her son sleeping above the covers with his girlfriend. Despite that, she clung to Lucas for dear life. The things Max was saying in her nightmares worried her. She figured Max carried some guilt over her brother's death. Add to the fact she lives with an absolute monster. She would call Susan sometimes to see if Neil was working late before going grocery shopping. He had a tendency to show up and harass her and Erica when out on errands.

Virgil walked up behind her and gave her a hug. "He is a gentleman, I'm glad you taught him to be one." He said. Priscilla smiled a little. "He learned from you Mr. Sinclair." She said. Virgil smiled to himself.

"Listen, I am calling Ted and Claudia later. We are going to try and break into Starcourt and look around. See if we can find something." Virgil said. Priscilla looked at him like he was crazy. She led Virgil away from the guest room. "Are you insane?" She asked. Virgil shook his head.

"No, I have a thought. Nobody was allowed inside after the fire. Hell the fire department wasn't ours. Our kids are tight lipped about what happened and you and I both know we won't get any answers from them. So I figured we should go and look around. If we have some idea, maybe we can help them." Virgil explained. Priscilla was still unconvinced but realized he had made up his mind about this. "Fine. But you better bring back something substantial" She said. Virgil gave her a grin. "Either that or a trespassing charge." He said with a laugh.

### *Henderson House*

Claudia Henderson watched her son eat breakfast when Virgil called. He told her his harebrained plan that just made sense. She would join them. Luckily Dustin was going over to Steve's house so she will try and sell him the idea of staying the night. It wouldn't be to difficult, seeing as Dustin and Steve were practically brothers. She was glad he had the role model, she just wished Dustin didn't learn how to keep secrets like a high schooler.

She looked inside her pantry and saw a few things missing. "Dusty sweetie, when you get done with breakfast I want you to get started on the lawn." She said grabbing her keys. "I am heading to the store." Dustin gave her a nod as he finished his eggs. Claudia smiled at him as she left.

The drive to the market was short. Her observations was seeing the town slowly recovering from the economic disaster Kline put them all through with that mall. Sure she was excited at first, but seeing Melvald's nearly close down and several families lose their homes made Claudia wonder if it was worth it. Pulling into the market, she noticed Karen and Priscilla were inside. She smiled slightly as she met up with the other women.

"Where's Holly?" Claudia asked, noticing the lack of the blonde toddler. Karen smiled slightly. "Ted is taking care of her right now. If it wasn't for him having to pick up Mike later, he probably would have gone grocery shopping for me." Karen said. Claudia smiled, usually Ted was pretty useless but lately he seemed to be doing better about being helpful.

"So, why does Virgil need you to accompany him and Ted but neither Karen or myself are coming?" Priscilla asked. She wasn't suspicious of their motives, just thought it odd the wives had to stay at home. "Well, I think it has to do with Ted and Virgil might hurt themselves and I am the only one they know with medical experience." Claudia explained. Priscilla nodded and accepted the answer. Karen shook her head. Ted explained what was going on and she did not like having to sit around and wait for the men folk to return. Ted agreed but he promised he would explain everything they found.

The trio kept up their grocery shopping when they saw Neil Hargrove also in the store. He looked to be in a foul mood so people were giving him a wide berth. He looked over and saw Priscilla and his eyes narrowed.

"Glad I found you." Neil said as he moved to her. Claudia and Karen moved to flank Priscilla, their eyes narrowing. "Oh, you think I'm scared of a slut and a bitch." Neil said while glaring.

"Oh, we aren't protecting her from you. No, we are here to make sure

she doesn't beat your ass to severely." Karen said. Neil fixed a glare on her. Karen shrugged him off. Neil fixed his glare back to Priscilla. "Maxine did not come home last night. I knew she was with that boy of yours last night." He said.

"She did stay the night. But she stayed in our guest room." Priscilla said. She could see Neil getting visibly more angry. "Well, I don't want Maxine associating with you people anymore. Now you tell her to come home so I can discipline her for disobeying me." He said. Priscilla rolled her eyes. "You know Neil, I don't think I will. Hell if it were up to me, you wouldn't even lay eyes on her ever again. Now get out of my sight before I forget I am a civilized woman." She said. Neil scoffed at her. "As if people like you can be civilized. You can put a monkey in a suit and teach it to answer a phone but at the end of the day it's still a monkey." Neil snarled and stalked off.

"That man is always a pleasant person to speak to." Claudia said and they began laughing. "But seriously, I am considering talking to Susan about keeping Max at my house." Claudia said. The other women nodded, all having the same idea.

### *Susan*

A few minutes after Max left her office, Susan went to the bathroom to get herself together. Neil had been on the warpath last night when Max didn't come home. She figured if she came home Max would have to face Neil's wrath. So she made the decision to tell Max to stay away for a while. Susan was just glad Max had a decent circle of friends, even if they are boys.

She left the restroom and found Mr. Akechi standing by her desk. Susan saw the concern in his face. She thought it was cute the way his brow furrowed when he was worried. "I am sorry to overhear your conversation with your daughter. That sounds horrible." He said as she approached her desk. Susan merely nodded. "Yes well, My husband is a difficult person to live with." She said. Kiryu shook his head. "He should not be making you live in fear. I may need to have a discussion with him." He said. Susan slightly giggled at the idea. "No, as amusing as it is, I don't want you in trouble." Susan said. Kiryu seemed to accept the answer. "Well, in any case. I would like you to accompany me to dinner tonight. I have a meeting with Harrington

Ventures and I would like you to come with me." He said.

Susan was a little flattered. "Okay, where are we going?" She asked. Kiryu relaxed a little, thinking Susan would give pushback. "My sister opened a restaurant here in town. It's called the Golden Dragon." He said. "Max is heading their for lunch. Might have fun." She said.

Later that evening, Susan arrived at the Golden Dragon with Kiryu. He wore a grey suit with a red shirt while Susan wore a red dress. They saw the Harrington car already parked. "I don't know a lot about the Harringtons, other than their son watches my daughter and her friends." She explained. Kiryu nodded and opened the door for her.

It was a cozy and ornate place, low lighting all around. Kiryu looked and saw Mrs. Harrington waiting by the table. Looking around, they noticed Mr. Harrington was missing. April noticed and explained. "My husband had another engagement to attend. Rest assured Mr. Akechi, I am more than capable of handling any business matters." She explained. Kiryu nodded, accepting the explanation. Kiryu waited for the ladies to take their seats.

Dinner was a subdued affair. Susan didn't know why she was brought along, but he made an effort to include her in the conversation. Soon, the owner came by the table. She was a beautiful woman, in a red eastern style dress. Susan remembered Kiryu saying that was his sister and she could see a family resemblance. She smiled at the table as she approached.

"Hello, I am Reina Akechi. I am so glad you conducted your meeting here." She said. Susan gave her a smile as she ate some noodles. "Oh you must be Mrs. Hargrove. Kiryu talks about you all the time." She said. Susan and Kiryu both chocked on their food. April had an amused smile on her face. "Yes, his favorite color is red and he talks about your hair endlessly." She said. Kiryu's face was also turning red from embarrassment.

"Reina, Mrs. Hargrove is here to assist with a business meeting." Kiryu said. Reina laughed in slight embarrassment. "Oh, my apologies. I thought you finally asked her out. I mean, why would you need your receptionist to help with a simple formality." She said

walking off. Susan looked at Kiryu with open mouth shock while April was laughing. She needed some air and excused herself outside.

Standing outside, Susan began collecting herself. She had little doubt she was attracted to her boss, he was a very handsome man after all, but she would never pursue him seeing as she was both married and working for him. But the fact he talked about her made her feel slightly special. The door opened and Kiryu stepped out. "I am sorry for Reina, she can be very embarrassing." He said. Susan smiled at him. "It's fine. I have a couple of sisters who would do much worse." She said.

"I do mention you sometimes but mostly it is your hair. It's really my favorite color." He said, his cheeks flushing red. "So what would you do if I dyed my hair to black?" She teased him. He laughed. "Probably fire you and see how backed up we get in paperwork." He said. The pair shared a laugh. He led her to his car to take her home.

They drove in silence, neither wanting to talk about the awkward end of dinner. Susan looked out of the window and saw two cars at the mall. It was strange since that was supposed to be sectioned off. "Isn't that place supposed to be abandoned now?" She asked. Kiryu looked over and saw the cars. "Yes, lets go check it out." He said. She nodded as he turned into the parking lot.

They parked next to the two cars. One of them Susan recognized as Mr. Sinclair's car, the other looked like a high end luxury car. They saw the chain used to keep the door closed was cut open. Kiryu took a flashlight out of his trunk and went inside first, followed by Susan.

They walked a short while when they saw the flashlights and heard arguing. "Will you idiots stop it already, we are here we might as well work together." Susan heard the voice of Claudia Henderson.

"I am just saying, he came out of nowhere." Ted Wheeler said. Kiryu marched forward, ready to deal with the intruders. They walked up and saw Virgil on the ground with a bloody nose, Claudia attending him, Frank Harrington standing by with a wooden stick and Ted standing around.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" Kiryu demanded. Frank got

into a defensive position with the stick and swung it at Kiryu. Kiryu grabbed the stick, pulled it out of Frank's hands and shoved him into a wall.

Ted got between the pair to prevent a fight. "We could ask you the same thing." Frank said. "This is a building that I am keeping safe. Their was supposed to be a security guard here." Kiryu said. Frank looked embarrassed. "Yea, I kinda bribed him off. I needed access to the building." He said. Kiryu's eyes narrowed at him.

"This was not given to me by Hawkins. This Mall is a government contract. How dare you break in here!" Kiryu shouted. Virgil and Claudia looked up at him. "Why the hell is this mall a government contract?" Claudia asked. Kiryu shrugged his shoulders. "I was given a contract for construction at a later date. But till then I was to keep people out." Kiryu explained. Susan walked over to Virgil and sat down with him and Claudia.

"Was Max okay last night? I was worried about her." Susan asked. Virgil smiled at her. "She was fine. Except for the nightmares." He said. Susan nodded, knowing her daughter still suffered from nightmares. "We will take turns keeping her safe from Neil. And if you need a place to stay, we are all willing to help." Claudia said. Susan smiled, glad that people care.

The group stood up and gathered around each other. "Listen Mr. Akechi, we have had a lot of issues with our kids lately and it all came after the incident on July 4th. We just thought we could see if we could find some answers." Virgil explained. Kiryu nodded. "Already the official story is kinda bullshit." Ted said as he shined his flashlight. "These look like a lot of cosmetic burns. Not enough to cause structural damage." Ted explained. Kiryu nodded, seeing the superficial burns on the columns.

"I never came in here myself. I just added the chains and the hazard signs around. The guard was told to never enter here." Kiryu explained. The rest nodded as they headed for the food court. The damage around had been cleaned up but it still looked like some kind of demolition had gone on here.

In the middle of the food court, sitting amongst the ruins, was a man.

He was reading a book with an overhead light above him. He also had a tv and VCR next to him. He had greying hair and looked pudgy as he sat their reading his book. He also had several stacks of thick files next to him.

He looked up as the group approached and he gave them a warm smile. "Hey, welcome to Starcourt. I have been waiting for you." He said. He noticed Susan and Kiryu and had a slight disappointed expression. "Well, Mr. Akechi, I didn't expect you here. And Mrs. Hargrove, I would have expected your husband here." He said. Susan shook her head. "He would never come here. But we only came because we saw the cars outside." She explained.

"Well, I am glad you came. My name is Dr. Sam Owens. I work for the government." He said. Kiryu stepped forward and took a look at the man. "You were the one who hired me." He said. Sam nodded at him. "Yup. Needed to keep the place guarded. Glad that worked out." He said sarcastically. "But I digress, I was waiting for you to arrive all weekend. And now I can shine some lights for you." He said as more flood lights came on and illuminated the food court.

"Well, I dunno why he is allowed to stay." Frank said, pointing to Kiryu. Kiryu glared at Frank. "He can be trusted to keep secrets." Sam said. Frank looked at Kiryu and accepted the explanation. "So, I'm guessing you all are wondering what is going on here?" Sam asked.

"Yea, my question is what the hell happened here?" Ted asked. Sam nodded his head, feeling foolish for not thinking that being the main question. "Well, to tell you the truth, it's a long story." Sam said.

Sam explained about MKUltra, Terry Ives and her daughter Jane, about how Martin Brenner took her and left Terry catatonic. That part of the story had Frank and Kiryu wanting to hunt down Brenner. The story went strange when Sam explained that Jane, now known as Eleven, had psychic powers and was being used to spy on the Russians and somehow opened a gate to another dimension.

"The gate led to an alternate place called The Upside Down. During the confusion of the gate being opened, Eleven escaped. At the same time, a creature came through and began hunting people. One person it took was Will Byers." He explained. "The next day, Eleven was

picked up by three boys attempting to find their lost friend and bring her to one of their homes. That home was Mike Wheeler's home." He said.

Ted nodded, remembering how Mike kept a girl in their basement for a week. Sam handed them a picture of Eleven, and it was the girl Ted thought was Russian. His heart broke when Sam explained she was taken as a newborn and treated like a lab rat. He looked at the photo and thought she was even more familiar.

Sam then explained how the girl used her powers to kill the creature, named the Demogorgon by the kids, and seemingly also perished. In reality she was brought into the Upside Down and escaped moments later. She hid for months before Jim Hopper found her in the woods and hid her for a year.

He then details how in early November, a hostile creature from the Upside Down began an invasion, first by possessing Will Byers, then also putting tunnels under Hawkins so his army could move freely. It culminates when the creature, dubbed Mind Flayer, invades the lab and kills most of the people inside. "Who keeps letting the kids name these things?" Frank asks. Everyone shushes him.

Sam explains how Eleven used her powers to seal the gate and how Joyce Byers exorcised the Mind Flayer from Will, leading to the world saved and Eleven being given a new identity. The group smiled, glad the girl got a new life. Then he explained July. About how the Russians bank rolled the mall so they could build their lab. And how their lab opened a gate and awakened the piece of the Mind Flayer trapped in Hawkins. How it started possessing people, including Billy Hargrove, and began hunting down Eleven. The rest of the story was fuzzy for Owens as he got very little of the story. "Wait, you said Billy was taken by this Mind Flamer thing? I thought he died saving his step sister and friend?" Susan asked.

"I am glad you asked that. It's better if I show you. You see, most of the people taken by the entity were merged into a giant monster thing. And well, this happened." Owens said as he turned the TV on and hit play. It was surveillance footage of the food court. It looked like several people were running and hiding, as a massive creature entered through the skylight. It looked like a massive spider. They

managed to escape the creature and after some fast forwarding, it showed Billy carrying a girl on his shoulders as the monster returned.

The party returned as the monster was going to kill the girl, and began lobbing explosives at the creature. It also looked like the girl was trying to talk to Billy and as the party ran out of explosives, Billy shielded the girl with his own body and soon after, the monster killed Billy. "After this, Jim Hopper and Joyce Byers destroyed the machine keeping the gate opened and killed the monster. Jim died in the explosion." Sam explained.

Susan sat in shock, seeing her step son was the cause of most of this. Well, he wasn't the cause, that monster was. Frank was also in shock. He realized his son was a damn hero. Pride filled him as he realized his boy helped save the world, twice.

Ted realized he knew some things now, but he didn't seem to have the full story. "It seems you are leaving stuff out Owens." Ted said. Sam nodded his head. "Not my story to tell. I think it's time you talked to your kids. Take a folder, show them you know, and maybe they will open up." Owens said.

"But, just so you know. The girl, Eleven, she managed to pull Billy out of his possession. He died a hero." Owens said as he handed a thick file to Susan. She nodded as she took the folder. Each of the parents took a folder and headed out but Kiryu and Susan stayed behind. "I can't tell my husband about this. He will hurt my daughter over this." She explained. Owens got a look in his eye, a dangerous look. "Oh don't worry. I am sure things will work themselves out." He said giving Kiryu a look.

The group left the mall and went their separate ways. Virgil dropped off Claudia and Ted at their homes. Virgil came home and found Priscilla waiting for him. Together the pair looked through the files while Priscilla had the same shocks her husband had.

Susan came home and found Neil was out. Kiryu came in with her and started a pot of coffee for them. He held her as she cried about her step son. She fell asleep and he tucked her into bed and Kiryu took the couch.

Frank made his way to the office where April was waiting. She saw the thick file in his hand. "Our son is a damn hero." He said as his wife handed him a glass of whiskey. Together they went through the file till early in the morning. They made their way home and found a couple of bikes with slashed tires on the front lawn. They entered their home and in the living room they found four teenagers asleep on their couch. April smiled as they watched them sleep. They heard someone walking down the stairs and heard their son speak. "Hey mom, Hey dad, ya'll are back." He said. Pair turned around and Frank lifted the file he was carrying. "Steven, we need to talk."

So, one reason it took forever to get this done was I have been having serious burnout issues. Another is life has been interesting. Recently i started a new job, then my stepdad, who i lived with, passed away. I now have to find a new place to live. I will try to write to get my head clear. This story, maybe two to three more chapters. Hardware might be ten more. I hope you guys enjoy and leave some feedback